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A. J. Cronin's Career and Fiction with specific reference *The Citadel*
and the context of the foundation of the National Health Service

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy in Scottish Literature

School of Critical Studies

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Abstract

Dr A. J. Cronin practised medicine for eleven years before becoming a highly successful novelist, authoring twenty-five novels, the most widely read and influential being *The Citadel* (1937). This novel charts the medical career of a young recently qualified doctor and weaves a number of key aspects of medical care through an absorbing storyline. It also highlights deficiencies in the care of patients, variable standards of health care based on social status and inadequate postgraduate training. The influence of *The Citadel* on the founding of the National Health service (NHS) has been the subject of debate for many years. Cronin spent three years in the South Wales town of Tredegar which had an impressive Medical Aid Society. Aneurin Bevan, who was to become the architect of the NHS, lived at that time in Tredegar and was involved in the Society. Cronin's writings and putative link to Bevan support the widely held view that *The Citadel* was a catalyst for the foundation of the NHS, one of the key societal events of the twentieth century in the UK. This thesis will explore how Cronin's personal views and authorial opinions expressed specifically in *The Citadel* but also in his other writings impacted on the founding of the NHS.

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Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contributions of others, this thesis is the result of my own work, has been composed by myself and that the work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Francis G Dunn

Signature:

Introduction

A recent article in the *Postgraduate Medical Journal*¹ encapsulates current accepted thinking on the two individuals who were most closely associated with the founding of the National Health Service (NHS). One was the politician Aneurin Bevan (1897-1960) and the other the writer and doctor A. J. Cronin (1896-1981). Bevan's role is self-evident as Secretary of State for Health in the years leading up to the founding of the NHS in 1948 and by his total commitment to that objective. Cronin's reputed role relates directly to the writing of his fifth novel *The Citadel* (1937).² There is no clear evidence that the two men ever met but there are a number of links between them, contributing to the view of their dual importance in the founding of the NHS, a view which has been supported by many in the years since then in medical³ and literary articles.⁴ Conversely authoritative historical reviews by John E. Pater⁵ and Charles Webster⁶ on the making of the NHS do not mention Cronin or *The Citadel*. While the main part of the argument of this thesis focusses more on Cronin's writing generally and in particular on its autobiographical elements, an underlying argument is developed that despite popular perception of Cronin's role and especially that of *The Citadel* in the foundation of the NHS, Cronin was relatively unsympathetic to the idea of a nationalised health service. This thesis is therefore an exposition of Cronin's fiction, especially *The Citadel*, and its popularity alongside an enquiry into the relationship between his creative work, his own views and other factors in the foundation of the NHS.

Bevan was born and brought up in Tredegar which delivered health care through a well run Medical Aid Society, a feature of many South Wales mining towns. This was the source of a famous quote attributed to Bevan: 'All I am doing is extending to the whole population of Britain the

¹ J. Launer, 'A Tribute to Tredegar', *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 95 (2019), 407-408.

² Dr. A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937).

³ S. O'Mahony, 'A. J. Cronin and *The Citadel*: did a work of fiction contribute to the founding of the NHS?', *J.R. Coll Physicians Edinburgh*, 42 (2012), 172-178.

⁴ R. McKibbin, 'Politics and the Medical Hero: A. J. Cronin's *The Citadel*', *English Historical Review*, 123, (2008), 651-78.

⁵ John E. Pater, *The Making of the National Health Service* (Kings Fund publishing Office, 1981).

⁶ Charles Webster, *The National Health Service: A Political History* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

benefits we had in Tredegar for a generation or more. We are going to Tredegar-ise you.⁷ This quote has entered folklore in Tredegar and beyond, although it has not been verified. It does however underscore the importance of the Tredegar Medical Aid Society.

Dr A. J. Cronin was employed by the Tredegar Medical Aid Society (TMAS) between 1921 and 1924, which overlapped with Bevan's time there. Cronin was appointed two years after graduating in Medicine from the University of Glasgow and was immediately impressed by the society and its secretary Walter Conway, who displayed a great social awareness of the needs of the local population. Cronin detailed his experiences in South Wales thirteen years later in *The Citadel* (1937),⁸ internationally acclaimed and a best-seller. Cronin is principally most well known for the success of this novel, which was enhanced by his own medical knowledge and experience. Cronin had amassed considerable medical experience in a range of professional posts over an eleven-year period and looked after many categories of patients from the socially deprived to the very wealthy. He, like Bevan, admired the quality of care provided by the Medical Aid Society and this led him to give consideration in *The Citadel* to some form of state-run health service.⁹ He also exposed graphically the deficiencies and inequality in health care provision and expressed concern regarding the absence of postgraduate training for young doctors and the lack of a scientific basis for many prescribed treatments.

Despite an eleven year gap between its publication and the commencement of the NHS, the major deficiencies in health care delivery highlighted in *The Citadel* and the impact this novel had in the United Kingdom (UK), led to the widely held view that Cronin, through this novel, had a key role in the founding of the NHS.¹⁰ This view was reinforced by Cronin's experiences in South Wales and Aneurin Bevan's links to that area.¹¹ This thesis will analyse the impact of Cronin's literary skills in drawing attention to the state of health care in pre-NHS Britain and the political thinking around the requirement for an NHS. It will also reflect on the concerns raised in *The Citadel* regarding the non-progressive and often worthless treatment practices, the lack of evidence-

⁷ NHS 70: "We will Tredegar-ise the rest of you" *South Wales Argus*, 2018. Available: <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/16334612.nhs-70-we-will-tredegar-ise-the-rest-of-you>.

⁸ Dr. A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*.

⁹ Dr. A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p., 262.

¹⁰ S. O'Mahony, 172-178.

¹¹ J. Launer, 407-408.

based medicine, the lack of postgraduate medical training and the unregulated nature of private practice in London where Cronin worked for four years.

The influence of Cronin and his writings requires further examination in view of the recognition that the founding of the NHS was one of the pivotal political and societal events of the twentieth century in the UK. The aim of this thesis is to explore how Cronin's own views and his writings, with specific reference to *The Citadel*, impacted on the delivery of health care in the UK from the time of its writing until the foundation of the NHS. The thesis will also reflect on how his religious and societal views influenced his writings. The thesis will furthermore address the popular appeal and literary value of Cronin's novels beyond his personal views and authorial intentions.

These objectives will be achieved firstly through a detailed analysis of *The Citadel*, the background to its phenomenal popularity¹² and the impact it had in literary circles, within the medical profession, on the general public and in awakening interest internationally in health care delivery. Secondly, other relevant novels and articles by Cronin will be fully analysed. Thirdly, the biographies by Salwak¹³ and Davies¹⁴ will be utilised to assist in building a picture of Cronin, his life and beliefs. Fourthly, archive information from the National Library of Scotland, The University of Glasgow, St Aloysius' College and Dumbarton Library will be extensively referred to as will requested information from key historians, former residents of Tredegar and other relevant individuals. Finally, thanks to the Cronin Family, access has been granted to review Cronin's Unpublished Autobiography and other key papers in their possession.

Chapter one of the Thesis will analyse Cronin's place in the literary canon of Scottish and UK novelists in the twentieth century, including reflection on his relative lack of prominence. This chapter will then review his early life and how this impacted on his writings. Chapter two will address Cronin's medical training, the delivery of health care around that time and how his medical career influenced his writings. Chapter three will present a summary of *The Citadel* and Cronin's relationship with his publisher Victor Gollancz who contributed substantially to the commercial success of Cronin's novels. This chapter will also analyse reviews of *The Citadel* within the wider news media as well as the medical profession. It will also reflect on Cronin's own response to the

¹² The popularity of *The Citadel* took even the publisher Gollancz by surprise. There were a total of nineteen impressions made of the first edition between July 1937 and December 1939 with twelve of these in 1937. The jacket of the December 1939 impression boldly proclaimed sales of 297,029 in England alone. Dr. A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel* (Gollancz, 1939).

¹³ Dale Salwak, *A. J. Cronin* (Twayne Publishers, 1985).

¹⁴ Alan Davies, *A. J. Cronin: The Man Who Created Dr Finlay* (Alma books, 2011).

reception of the novel. Chapter four will review other relevant literary works to further explore Cronin's views on health care and societal issues and the projection of *The Citadel* through its cinematic portrayal and within other broadcast media. It will also analyse how Cronin's political, societal and religious views impacted on his writings and in particular within the context of the practice of UK medicine. The final chapter will compare the relative contributions and influence of Bevan, Andrew Manson, who was the principal character in *The Citadel*, the novel and A. J. Cronin in the founding of the NHS.

Chapter 1:

The Relative Invisibility of A. J. Cronin as a Literary Figure, his Early Life and its Impact on his Writings

1.1 The Relative Invisibility of A. J. Cronin as a Literary figure.

There are two biographies of A. J. Cronin, written by Dale Salwak in 1985¹ and Alan Davies in 2011.² Salwak recalls sending a copy of his biography to an eminent literary friend, Philip Larkin, who thanked him and replied ‘Why him? Am I missing something?’³ This was despite Cronin being consistently one of the largest selling international authors of the twentieth century⁴ and being compared in his early writing years to Charles Dickens,⁵ Emily Bronte and Thomas Hardy.⁶ The comparison with Dickens related to the Dickensian style which Cronin used and with Bronte and Hardy through the many dark scenes in his first novel, *Hatter’s Castle* (1931).⁷ Percy Hutchison concluded following the publication of this novel: ‘*Hatter’s Castle* is the most important work in English fiction in decades, for it is a restoration of the English novel as it begins with Fielding, Richardson and Smollett.’⁸ Hutchison went on to say that Cronin had turned his back on the allurements and artificialities which had diverted the English novel from its great tradition of portrayal of human life and human lives. This aspect was to be a feature of many of Cronin’s novels and the astute and captivating portrayal of his characters was a factor in their commercial success. *Hatter’s Castle* bore comparisons to George Douglas Brown’s *The House with the Green*

¹ Dale Salwak.

² Alan Davies.

³ Dale Salwak, Email Communication, 29 July 2020. By permission.

⁴ For example, *Hatter’s Castle*, which was accepted by the first publisher it was submitted to, was translated into twenty-one languages and in all editions sold over three million copies.

⁵ Orville Prescott, ‘Books of the Times’, *New York Times*, 20 July 1953, p. 15.

⁶ Percy Hutchison, ‘*Hatter’s Castle* ; A Novel in the Great Tradition’, *New York Times*, 19 July 1931, p. 3.

⁷ A. J. Cronin, *Hatter’s Castle* (Gollancz, 1931).

⁸ Percy Hutchison, p. 3.

Shutters(1901),⁹ which displayed a deliberately grotesque caricature of Kailyard.¹⁰ The year after *Hatter's Castle* was published, Lewis Grassie Gibbon wrote the hugely popular *Sunset Song* (1932)¹¹ which its author described as a half-way house between the classical kailyard *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*(1894)¹² and its antithesis *The House with the Green Shutters*. Cronin's subsequent novels seemed to follow a similar line to *Sunset Song* with a balance between kailyard and anti-kailyard.¹³ Cronin had a sense of what the public wanted and what sold books and this may have steered him away from purely anti-kailyard novels. His second novel *Three Loves* (1932) was also anti-kailyard but thereafter his novels effectively balanced this with a softer aspect of admirable heroes, good deeds and engaging love stories often in rural settings, as exemplified in the Television series *Dr Finlay's Casebook*,¹⁴ based on the novella *Country Doctor*.¹⁵ Andrew Nash¹⁶ mentions Cronin on one occasion in his book referring to Tom Nairn who stated that '*Dr Finlay's Casebook*¹⁷ was an émigré creation designed largely for a foreign reading public.'¹⁸ However it was also hugely popular in all parts of the UK. The range of Cronin's writings from the anti-kailyard *Hatter's Castle* through to *Dr Finlay's Casebook* is noted by Alan Riach in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Literature*.¹⁹ Riach also underscores the immense popularity of Cronin's

⁹ George Douglas Brown, *The House with the Green Shutters* (London: John McQueen, 1901).

¹⁰ After publication of *Hatter's Castle*, there was some suggestions of plagiarism and four years later a letter of complaint was sent to Gollancz in this regard because of its similarity to *The House with the Green Shutters*. Cronin admitted that he had read *The House with the Green Shutters* some twenty years earlier but stated emphatically that there was no question of plagiarism. His assertion was accepted.(Correspondence between T.H Pringle and Victor Gollancz, 20/21 March 1935, Orion Archives).

¹¹ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *Sunset Song* (Jerrolds Publishing, 1932).

¹² Ian McLaren, *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (Dodd, Metro and Company, 1894).

¹³ The term Kailyard was initially used in 1895 by the critic J. H. Miller, in an article published in W. E. Henley's *New Review*. Miller characterised that contemporary literary impulse as 'a revolt of the provinces against the centre'. -see Andrew Nash, *Kailyard and Scottish Literature* (Brill/ Rodopi, 2007). This term continues to be used more to describe rural settings and their associations and therefore is applied to a wide range of novels. It is worth reflecting that very few novels are exclusively kailyard and often contain elements of a more realistic Scottish scenario.

¹⁴ *Dr Finlay's Casebook*, BBC Television Series, 1962-1971.

¹⁵ A. J. Cronin, 'Country Doctor', *Hearst International Cosmopolitan Magazine*, May 1935.

¹⁶ Andrew Nash, *Kailyard and Scottish Literature* (Brill/ Rodopi, 2007), p. 233.

¹⁷ *Dr Finlay's Casebook*.

¹⁸ Tom Nairn. *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London:Verso, 1981).

¹⁹ Alan Riach, 'Arcades—The 1920s and 1930s', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed.by Ian Brown and Alan Riach (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 57.

novels.

A. J. Cronin as a writer presents a paradox that sometimes arises in literary criticism in that despite his commercial success and positive reviews, he was all but ignored in academic literary circles including at the time of publication of his most successful novels. Orville Prescott stated, ‘In terms of fame and fortune, Dr Cronin is one of the most triumphantly successful writers of his generation, yet has caused little stir in the world of letters and has aroused only the most lukewarm critical admiration.’²⁰ A large part of *The Citadel* was set in South Wales and yet Cronin is not mentioned in either *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*²¹ or in *One Hundred Years of Welsh Fiction*²² which includes a detailed analysis of Welsh fiction in English.

On a wider level, there is no mention of Cronin in an authoritative book on the literary-political culture of the inter-war years,²³ although brief mention is made by R. M. Braco²⁴ in his study of middlebrow²⁵ writers. Cronin’s obituary in *The Times* stated: ‘He was “middlebrow” fiction of the most adroit and telling kind, handsomely adapted to the usage of the cinema’,²⁶ and continued saying that Cronin set out in writing his first novel with the firm intention of being one of the most successful novelists of that time.²⁷ Cronin’s writings reflect the middlebrow genre of popular, easy-to-read novels with compelling storylines. Everyman’s Library (founded in 1906) could be regarded as the starting point for this movement and H. G. Wells’s *Short History of the*

²⁰ Orville Prescott, ‘Books of the Times’, *New York Times*, 13 November 1944, p. 17.

²¹ Meic Stephens, *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

²² Stephen Thomas Knight, *A Hundred Year of Welsh Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).

²³ Mahieu, D. L., *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: 1988), pp. 317-31.

²⁴ R. M. Braco, *Betwixt and Between: Middle Brow Fiction and English Society in the Twenties and Thirties*, (University of Melbourne, 1990), 64, pp. 72-3, in R. McKibbin, ‘Politics and the Medical Hero: A. J. Cronin’s *The Citadel*’, *English Historical Review* 123, (2008), 651-78.

²⁵ The term ‘middlebrow’ in literature historically has derogatory connotations being used to describe novels with popular appeal but not requiring deep intellect to understand and appreciate. It has morphed to an admired and widely analysed genre within literature being associated with many of the outstanding novelists of the last hundred years. It is now valued within academic circles and has its own educational website. (<https://middlebrownetwork.com>).

²⁶ [Anon.], ‘Dr A. J. Cronin; Doctor Who became Graphic Novelist’, *The Times*, 10 January 1981, p. 14.

²⁷ Success for Cronin is evident in the popularity of his novels and recognition of this by the critics and the wider world but not specifically within literary academic circles. The strong narrative and medical dimension were key factors in his success.

World (1922)²⁸ distilled his earlier book *The Outline of History* (1919)²⁹ into a form which was more attractive to the busy general reader. Wells's novels were classic examples of the SciFi genre fiction as indeed were Cronin's in the genre of medical fiction. These between-the-wars novels contributed to the increase in popular middlebrow fiction in genres which also included the legal profession, law enforcement and romance. Commercial success was a part of this movement and Cronin's theme of the heroic figure from an impoverished background taking on and triumphing over hardship and the establishment firmly located him in the commercial field within the fiction industry.

Cronin was unimpressed by the psychoanalytic domination of Modernism stating that:

It has a pernicious effect on fiction because it offers easy cuts to psychological profundity. Surely literature is the mouthpiece of the humanities, not the insanities. It is to me a matter of amazement that such writing is tolerated let alone revered.³⁰

Such views on modernism were unlikely to endear Cronin to the academic establishment.³¹ He very much felt there was still a place for traditional realistic craftsmen and viewed expansive story narration as an art as much as the more occlusive, obtuse fictional writings of Gertrude Stein, and T. S. Eliot, the poet of *The Waste Land* (1922). Cronin admitted that, as time went by, he found writing more of a challenge and composition to be 'a sweat and an agony' and further stated in 1944 that 'his chief purpose in life to improve as a writer, is a desire clearly handicapped by success. No one is more vulnerable than an author who sells well.'³² At this point, his previously prolific daily word number had gone down from 5000 to 1000 words.³³ It could be argued that his best writing years

²⁸ H. G. Wells, *A Short History of the World* (London: Cassell, 1922).

²⁹ H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (Newnes, 1919).

³⁰ A. J. Cronin. Speech to an unknown literary gathering in London pre-1939, as quoted in Alan Davies, pp.18-19.

³¹ The Literature departments in Universities, the Broad Sheet reviewers and the higher social echelons of society in London and Paris who were inclined to support the Modernist school of writing.

³² [Anon.], 'Books and Authors', *New York Times*, 5 November, 1944, BR 8.

³³ *Ibid.*

were behind him as subsequent novels to 1944, although selling well, never received the plaudits of his earlier works. It would seem that the pressure of success weighed heavily upon him.³⁴

Dale Salwak puts forward three reasons for the relative invisibility of Cronin within the academic critical notice.³⁵ The first relates to the deterioration in the quality of his novels in his later years and the tendency to regurgitate storylines from earlier successful novels.³⁶ An example of this is *Shannon's Way* (1948) about which Julian Symons (another eminent author) states: 'Dr Cronin's competent new novel is reminiscent of nothing more than the act of a once promising artist whose performance has staled with repetition.'³⁷ The second relates to the lack of nuance, ambiguity and obscure allusions in his novels, which were considered to be too predictable and unsophisticated, with plain and easily understandable narratives. The third relates to what Salwak felt was a degree of snobbery and jealousy as exemplified by critics who were inclined to turn their noses up at an author who published in such magazines as *The Reader's Digest* and also frequently topped the best seller lists.³⁸

It might have been expected that the lack of Cronin's long-term impact would not have been so evident in Scotland as he was one of the most commercially successful Scottish authors of all time. However, he is rarely mentioned in reviews or in lists of the most popular and highly rated Scottish writers.³⁹ There is a brief mention in Robert Crawford's *Scotland's Books* (2008) within which Crawford rather thinly notes that Cronin, like James Bridie, studied Medicine at the University of Glasgow and then describes Cronin as 'A best selling and widely translated novelist, whose readable anti-kailyard saga *Hatter's Castle* preceded a popular series of medical tales'.⁴⁰ Marshall Walker also mentions Cronin briefly by stating that there are two types of Scottish writers

³⁴ Cronin felt the pressure of the considerable success of his first book, *Hatter's Castle* which established his name and provided the financial security for him to abandon medicine in favour of writing. His fourth book *The Stars Look Down* was also a success but neither of these novels matched the global success of *The Citadel*. Its popularity with the public and reviewers, the financial benefits and the fame it delivered were Cronin's benchmarks for success. Actual sales figures for *The Citadel* will be discussed in chapter three and were alluded to in the introduction.

³⁵ Dale Salwak, p. 131.

³⁶ There does seem to be repetition of themes and incidents in Cronin's novels particularly after *The Green Years* (1944). However his sales remained high and his storytelling ability never left him right to his last novel *The Minstrel Boy* (1975) written when he was seventy-eight.

³⁷ Julian Symons, 'Review of *Shannon's Way*', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 23 October, 1948, p. 593.

³⁸ Cronin published twenty three articles in *Reader's Digest* as well as in such diverse periodicals as *Hearst's International-Cosmopolitan*, *Good House Keeping*, *Life*, and *Australian Women's Weekly*.

³⁹ Gerard Carruthers, *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (Penguin Books, 2008), p. 596.

— serious such as George Douglas Brown, John MacDougall Hay, Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon and entertainers such as Cronin, Conan Doyle, Neil Munro, Compton Mackenzie and John Buchan.⁴¹ Roderick Watson in his book *The Literature of Scotland* states that Cronin's *Hatter's Castle* re-created some of the themes of *The House with the Green Shutters* 'in an element of sentimental realism'.⁴² *Hatter's Castle* is also mentioned briefly in *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999) by Cairns Craig who discusses the powerful influence of the anti-kailyard *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901) on such novels as *Hatter's Castle* (1931) and *Gillespie* (1914)⁴³, both of which have similar storylines.⁴⁴ *Hatter's Castle* is mentioned along the same lines in Volume 4 of *The History of Scottish Literature*⁴⁵ and there is a brief further mention of the popularity of this novel and of *The Citadel*.⁴⁶ There is no mention of Cronin in Maurice Lindsay's *History of Scottish Literature*.⁴⁷ Lindsay does however discuss James Bridie, a contemporary author of Cronin's, by stating that: 'the only figure after Barrie with an output of any quantity or sustained individuality in English is James Bridie.'⁴⁸ Cronin is also not mentioned in Francis R. Hart's *The Scottish Novel from Smollett to Spark* (1978),⁴⁹ or in Berthold Schoene's *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*,⁵⁰ or in Kurt Wittig's *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*.⁵¹ One possible explanation for Cronin's relative lack of recognition locally relates to the settings of many of his novels outwith Scotland although many of R. L. Stevenson's and Sir Walter Scott's works were also based outwith

⁴¹ Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature from 1707* (London, Longman, 1996), p. 217.

⁴² Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London:Macmillan, 1984), p. 407.

⁴³ John MacDougall Hay, *Gillespie* (new edition. Canongate, 1979). This novel features an ambitious ruthless man who like Brodie in *Hatter's Castle* and Gourlay in *The House with the Green Shutters* is determined to control and dominate all before him with no regard for others.

⁴⁴ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp 57-58.

⁴⁵ Isobel Murray, 'Novelists of the Renaissance', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen University Press, 1987), Vol. 4, p.115.

⁴⁶ Gavin Wallace, 'Compton Mackenzie and the Scottish Popular Novel', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen University Press, 1987), Vol. 4, p. 246.

⁴⁷ Maurice Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London: Robert Hale,1992).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.437.

⁴⁹ Francis R. Hart, *The Scottish Novel from Smollett to Spark* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1978).

⁵⁰ Berthold Schoene, *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

⁵¹ Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd, 1958).

Scotland and they are mentioned in Hart's book.⁵² Cronin never returned to Scotland for a sustained period of time after the age of twenty-five except for a few months in 1930 when he wrote *Hatter's Castle*. However he would have disputed the view that he had severed his connection with Scotland, loving to return there to enjoy his favourite leisure activities of golf and fishing, and to watch his football team Dumbarton. It is also possible that the public in Scotland were more inclined to favour native Scots whose primary career was writing rather than moving to it as a second profession. Thus the writings of Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid are far more likely to appear in reviews than the medically trained James Bridie and A. J. Cronin.⁵³ This may have been partly due the wealth which these authors accumulated (James Bridie had his own chauffeur and Cronin's books sales made him extremely wealthy).⁵⁴ Sir Walter Scott may be regarded as an exception in that he, like Cronin, had a professional background (as a lawyer), but is immortalised by having a major monument in his name and a railway station named after one of his books. He was however more of a native Scot than Cronin and with perhaps more clearly recognisable Scottish themes. In 1953, Alexander Reid stated:

In surveys of Scottish writings over the past forty years, the name of A. J. Cronin is often omitted. One reason for the omission is that Cronin severed his connection with Scotland early in life and that apart from his first novel *Hatter's Castle*, the distinctively Scots relevance of his work is slight. Another is that critical snobbery writes off best-selling novels as outside the field of serious criticism—the carping criticism which led to a serious under evaluation of books like Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings* and Neil Paterson's *Behold the Daughter*—but there may also be a third reason: a hurt feeling among many of Cronin's early admirers, that by not improving on his performance in *Hatter's Castle*, he had in some way let them down, trading success as a literary artist for the more solid rewards of the best-selling popular romancer.⁵⁵

Reid rejects this third reason but states that it does point to a reality. Hugh MacDiarmid was highly critical of both the film version of *The Green Years* (1946) and also of the novel by that name. He states:

⁵² Francis R. Hart, *The Scottish Novel from Smollett to Spark*.

⁵³ *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that Megan Coyer in her book on *Literature and Medicine in the Nineteenth Century Periodical Press* (2017) draws attention to often forgotten medico-literary figures in that century and their writings in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.

⁵⁵ Alexander Reid, 'The Story of a Best Seller', *Scotland's Magazine*, May 1961, pp. 55-56.

Mr A. J. Cronin is reputed to be one of the highest-paid authors in the English speaking world. So much for the English speaking world. His work is valueless, and in such a film as this, a shocking caricature of Scottish psychology and utterly indifferent to the real values of Scottish life and the great problems besetting it today.⁵⁶

MacDiarmid was in the minority with this highly critical view, reflecting his distaste for populist, commercially successful works. It seems harsh to state that Cronin's works were valueless and MacDiarmid's comments point to an element of scorn at Cronin's popularity and financial success within the fiction industry.

It is possible that Cronin's avowed Catholicism was a contributing factor to his lack of prominence in Scotland. Linden Bicket notes that George Mackay Brown's literary Catholicism is something that is still often met with hostility or perplexed incomprehension in mainstream Scottish literary criticism and goes on to say, 'The critical anxiety to diagnose the doctrinal cast of Calvinism as haunting the mind of the Scottish author has led to exclusion of other literary religious imaginaries, so the idea of a modern Scottish Catholic writer can barely be countenanced.'⁵⁷ In the days when Cronin was at his most productive, Scotland was plagued by sectarianism,⁵⁸ and these divisions reflected opinions in many aspects of society including the popularity of writers. It may be that as a result of the obsession of critics with the Protestant influence on Scottish writings and culture, Cronin fell victim to a degree of generic blindness to Scottish Catholic writings and culture. It is debatable whether this was a component in the lack of acknowledgement of Cronin in his home town and the institutions where he studied. Recently this has been addressed with a portrait in Dumbarton Library and a plaque (2018) unveiled by Cronin's Granddaughter Diana in the Medical Faculty of the University of Glasgow. There is also a blue plaque (2015) at Westbourne Grove in London where Cronin practised. This was unveiled in his honour by the Royal College of General Practitioners and organised by Ruth Richardson who stated, 'It was not the usual blue plaque that English Heritage awarded. They were snooty/dismissive of his writing.'⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose*, Volume III, ed. by Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998), pp. 107-109.

⁵⁷ Linden Bicket, *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 2.

⁵⁸ As noted later in this chapter.

⁵⁹ Ruth Richardson, Personal Communication by email, September 16 2019, with permission.

There has been increasing recognition of literature and its interconnectedness to medicine, especially in the ‘Medical Humanities’ in recent years, although the success of qualified doctors throughout the world, who became successful novelists and poets goes back many centuries. A recent review of how literature and medicine can be interestingly linked specifically mentions Cronin, in addition to Tobias George Smollett, Oliver Goldsmith, John Keats, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Anton Chekhov, William Somerset Maugham, William Carlos Williams, and Walker Percy.⁶⁰ There are many more writers, including in recent times, the North American based Abraham Verghese (born 1955), Atul Gawande (born 1965) and Paul Kalanathi (1977-2015). These authors all use their personal experiences and testimony in medicine to philosophise over their own health or the nature of a doctor’s vocation. For example Kalanathi⁶¹ describes the path that led him to choose medicine rather than his other favourite subject of writing, and his subsequent journey through medicine and to his early death from cancer at the age of thirty-seven. Gawande espouses the fundamentals of medical practice in his book *Being Mortal* and states:

We’ve been wrong about what our job is in medicine. We think our job is to ensure health and survival. But really it is larger than that. It is to enable wellbeing, and wellbeing is about the reason one wishes to be alive.⁶²

Thus, we see evidence in recent years of a more human side to doctors and the health challenges they face in their own lives.⁶³ In contrast, Cronin, while he used his medical experiences to great effect, focussed more on the ill health of his patients. Cronin was keen to emphasise the fictional nature of his novels and yet the striking similarities to time lines and events in his own life indicate factual, though disguised, aspects of his writings. His medical writings also exposed failings within the delivery of health care, much of which had a ring of gritty authenticity. Although Cronin was cautious about identifying individuals by their actions that might have led to any legal issue, there were two potentially libellous cases raised from *The Citadel* (1937). One involved the wife of Cronin’s first senior colleague and to defuse this situation, Cronin tempered his remarks about her in subsequent editions and changed her from being Dr Page’s wife to being his sister.⁶⁴ The senior

⁶⁰ M. Faith McLellan, Anne Hudson-Jones, ‘Why Literature and Medicine?’, *The Lancet*, 34, (1996), 109-110.

⁶¹ Paul Kalanathi, *When Breath Becomes Air* (Random House, 2016).

⁶² Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End* (Wellcome Collection, 2014).

⁶³ Sir Kenneth Calman, ‘Literature in the Education of the Doctor’, *The Lancet*, 350 (1997), 1620-1622.

⁶⁴ Alan Davies, pp. 142-145.

doctor in Tredegar (Dr Edwin Davies) also considered suing Cronin because he perceived the depiction of the Medical Superintendent in the book a slur on himself but after due consideration, he dropped the matter.⁶⁵ In this regard it is of interest to reflect on another well known doctor, author and playwright, James Bridie (1888-1951) who qualified in Medicine from Glasgow University six years before Cronin. Bridie did not approve of the use of clinical scenarios in novels since he felt there remained a possibility of the patient being recognised. He wrote in his Autobiography *One Way of Living* (1939)⁶⁶ around the time when *The Citadel* was extremely popular:

If a doctor who has attended me or my family in a professional capacity permits himself to describe our diseases or to report our quaint sayings in a public print, I shall take a stick and give him a good beating. I shall report him to the General Medical Council and the Court of Session. He can call me Mr Smith if he likes and alter my measles to influenza but if he tells the story well I will recognise myself and my neighbours will recognise me. He may put me into *The Lancet* under a number; but he must not write down my troubles for money or the entertainment of the vulgar and the inquisitive.

It is unclear whether Bridie had Cronin in mind when he wrote this but his comments regarding *The Citadel* suggest that he was not particularly impressed with the novel. He states that the hero unrealistically never makes a mistake in diagnosis or fails to apply the correct treatment.⁶⁷ Bridie further stated that: ‘I think it is a pity, however, and I am sure Dr Cronin thinks it is a pity, that the story should have been taken by the public to prove something.’⁶⁸ Bridie’s view was that all the novel proved was the need for a strong disciplinary body within the medical profession and the eternal simplicity, vulgarity, innocence and gullibility of the rich. It is of interest that a fellow Scot, also medical and a man of letters, expressed reservations about Cronin’s most successful novel. Perhaps as with McDiarmid, there was an element of scorn or perhaps jealousy.

In summary, A. J. Cronin was a popular and masterly storyteller. He had a number of novels in the first fifteen years of his writing career which were major international best sellers and universally highly regarded. The popularity of Cronin’s novels is confirmed by being chosen as

⁶⁵ A. J. Cronin, Letter to Victor Gollancz, Orion Archives, 18 May, 1937.

⁶⁶ James Bridie, *One Way of Living* (London: Constable, 1939), pp. 236-237.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 248-250.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

American Services Editions during World War Two.⁶⁹ Many authors regarded the selection of their novels for this organisation as a great honour and it contributed significantly to their careers.⁷⁰ There was a total of over 3000 titles in the list and 120,000,000 were distributed to the troops during World War Two. Cronin was one of relatively few authors from the UK chosen and five of his titles were selected and one was re-printed. The significance of this is underscored by the fact that many authors only had one title and even Charles Dickens managed just three.⁷¹ Several of Cronin's novels were made into widely acclaimed films featuring major stars of that industry.⁷² His lack of recognition in later life and after his death appears due to a variety of interacting factors but remains nonetheless surprising. Cronin became somewhat reclusive in his later years preferring to guard his privacy and stay away from any literary limelight. His death was widely publicised with obituaries in many UK and international newspapers. The *Washington Post* stated that Cronin delighted readers all over the World but induced only lukewarm praise from critics.⁷³ *The New York Times*⁷⁴ described him as one of the most popular authors in the English speaking world and *The Times* stated that he had remarkable ease and power of graphic narrative with themes which allowed him to agitate the heart and mind of even the least imaginative of readers.⁷⁵ His son Vincent, also an author, wrote an illuminating obituary stating that his Father's novels were both 'Indictments of social justice and expressions of a deep religious faith⁷⁶ and from the latter stemmed the warm humanity which gave his books worldwide appeal'.⁷⁷

1.2: Early Life and Undergraduate Career

Archibald Joseph Cronin was born at Rosebank Cottage near Cardross in 1896. He was the only child of an Irish Catholic father, Patrick and a Scottish Presbyterian mother, Jessie (Montgomery).

⁶⁹ *Books in Action; The Armed Services Edition*, ed. by John Cole Young (Washington 1984: Library of Congress).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² This will be expanded further in chapter four.

⁷³ I. Y. Smith, 'A. J. Cronin, Writer and Best-Selling Author Dies', *Washington Post*, 10 January 1981, p.10.

⁷⁴ Herbert Mitgang, 'A. J. Cronin, Author of *The Citadel* and *The Keys of the Kingdom*, dies', *New York Times*, 1981, 10 January, p.16.

⁷⁵ [Anon.], 'Dr A. J. Cronin; Doctor Who became Graphic Novelist', *The Times*, 10 January 1981, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Cronin's views on religion will be expanded in the last section of this chapter.

⁷⁷ Vincent Cronin, 'Recollections of a Writer', *The Tablet*, 1981, 21 February, pp. 175-176.

His parents' marriage in those days was referred to as a 'mixed marriage' and carried a stigma on both sides of the religious divide. The Cronins moved to Cardross shortly after A. J. was born and his early life was happy. His father was a great story teller and Cronin in his unpublished autobiography writes how his father would enchant him with stories involving a hero who was A. J. and on a nightly basis conquered evil.⁷⁸ This may be where the seeds were sown for Cronin's career as an author. Cronin also speaks of golfing at Cardross and fishing at the Geilston burn near their home, activities which were to remain popular with Cronin throughout his life. When Cronin was a young boy, his father developed tuberculosis and became progressively unwell, resulting in the family moving to Helensburgh, which was hoped would benefit his father's ill health. This, however, was to no avail and Cronin senior died in 1904, an event which understandably affected young Cronin who was very attached to his father. The biographies by Dale Salwak⁷⁹ and Alan Davies⁸⁰ emphasise the hardship faced by Cronin in the years after his father's death as does an article in the *Evening Times*.⁸¹ Cronin contrasted in his Last Will and Testament the advantages bestowed on his sons by their privileged upbringing with the 'poverty and hardships that were my lot following the untimely death of my father'.⁸² He and his mother moved in with her parents, and records in Dumbarton Library indicate that the grandparents disapproved of Cronin because of his Catholicism.⁸³ It is likely that they would still have been unhappy with his mother due to her pre-marital pregnancy, her marriage to a Catholic and her conversion to her husband's faith. Cronin's mother was determined to provide him with a good education and after primary school, he attended Dumbarton Academy where he flourished and began to appear in the prize lists in 1907 while in the elementary section of the School. He continued to feature prominently at the School prize giving,⁸⁴ displaying impressive talent in English and was commended for an essay in May 1912, shortly after the sinking of the Titanic. His teacher singled out the following passage for praise:

⁷⁸ A. J. Cronin, (1976), by permission of the Cronin Family Archives.

⁷⁹ Dale Salwak, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Alan Davies, p. 45-47.

⁸¹ Alasdair Marshall, 'Saved from the Scrap Heap', *Evening Times*, 4 December.1984.p.10-11.

⁸² A. J. Cronin. 'Last Will and Testament', A. J. Cronin Local History File, Dumbarton Library Heritage Centre.

⁸³ Article on A. J. Cronin, Local History File, Dumbarton Library Heritage Centre.

⁸⁴ Dumbarton Academy School Prize Lists, A. J. Cronin Local History File, Dumbarton Library Heritage Centre.

Lower and lower she sank, till at last like a crack of a breaking nut and a hiss of steam on water that slow elaborated production of one thousand brains and hands, the latest and competent expression of technical skill, broke completely in two.⁸⁵

Later in 1912, Cronin's mother was appointed as a sanitary inspector in Glasgow and decided to move to that city,⁸⁶ and send her son to St Aloysius' College which was a private school run by Jesuits. She was a remarkable woman and records from the Burgh of Glasgow confirm that she worked as a sanitary inspector commencing around 1912/1913.⁸⁷ There were nine inspectors at that time, including one other woman. There is also circumstantial evidence that prior to that, and following her husband's death, she worked in sales, combining the challenges of a single mother bringing up a gifted son, and securing the finance to support them both, and to provide him with the best possible education.⁸⁸ Helen McCarthy has addressed the issue of working women in the early part of the twentieth century and states:

Married women's labour was, in this setting, typically problematised as an 'evil' resulting from the incapacity, unemployment, or absence of a male breadwinner, or from long-established 'customs' that obtained in particular industries.⁸⁹

There was also the additional pressure on working women of contributing to male unemployment. Although Jessie Cronin could have obtained funds from her parents, she clearly was prepared to accept the hostility felt to some women workers in order to ensure the best possible start for her son. The promise he had shown in writing essays at Dumbarton Academy was further evidenced at St Aloysius' College. His mother had told him about a young boy she had come across in her work who was profoundly disabled by rickets. Cronin wrote a moving essay based on this individual entitled 'A Child of the Slums'. Cronin's essay displayed a social conscience and was praised by his teacher.⁹⁰ Thus we see at an early stage in his life, an awareness and concern for the social plight of

⁸⁵ Alan Davies, p. 65.

⁸⁶ National Library of Scotland, *Literary Manuscripts and other Papers of A. J. Cronin*, Acc.10106/18-19.

⁸⁷ Alan Davies, pp. 49-51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸⁹ Helen McCarthy. 'Social Science and Married Women's Employment in Post-War Britain', *Past & Present*, 233, 16, November 2016, 269–305.

⁹⁰ National Library of Scotland, Acc.10106/18-19.

the poor in Glasgow. On the sporting front, he captained the football team to the final of the Scottish Schools Cup and was an accomplished golfer. The archive files of St Aloysius' College also indicate that he had additional involvement in the religious activities of the school through the Sodality,⁹¹ indicating at that time a strong commitment to his faith. He won numerous prizes and gained a Carnegie Foundation Scholarship to study medicine at the University of Glasgow. Cronin mentioned later in life that his talent for writing was taken by friends and family to indicate that 'there was something wrong in my head'.⁹² He went on to say that the Scottish view was very practical—the career choice was between medicine and divinity and that he chose the lesser evil.⁹³

Cronin matriculated in medicine at the University of Glasgow in 1914 and in addition to placements in different hospitals, he spent a year working as a Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in World War One. *Adventures in Two Worlds* (1952) contains a number of reminiscences about his teachers in Glasgow (specifically Dr Ralph Stockman and Sir William McEwan) which match archival details from the University of Glasgow.⁹⁴ It would appear from *Adventures in Two Worlds* that Cronin was fascinated by medicine and in awe of his teachers. He was a diligent student and his subsequent recall of the detail of cases he had seen over thirty years previously underscores his interest as well as his impressive memory. There is never any suggestion of doubt in his student days about medicine as his chosen profession. He was keen to impress and to progress and states in *Adventures in Two Worlds*:

I felt that I stood well with Sir William McEwan who was the renowned surgical Professor; before I went to the Navy, I had received evidence of his consideration and in each of the three monthly examinations conducted since my return, I had gained first place.⁹⁵

⁹¹ St Aloysius' College, Archive Files on A. J. Cronin, 1912-1914.

⁹² [Anon.], *Cronin, Archibald Joseph*, Current Biography Year Book 1942, New York, Edited by Maxine Block (H. W. Wilson), pp. 167-170.

⁹³ Cronin's mother did everything possible to support her son in his studies and in his chosen career. St Aloysius' College had a major commitment to provide the opportunity for Catholic pupils to succeed in the professions—specifically Medicine, Law, Teaching and the Priesthood. It is unknown whether the School would have pressurised him into any particular profession.

⁹⁴ University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, School of Medicine collection, GB248 MED5/2/11, (1918-1919), Schedules of professional examination marks for A. J. Cronin.

⁹⁵ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds* (Gollancz, 1952), pp. 10-11.

Cronin also writes in *Adventures in Two Worlds*⁹⁶ of being most impressed at seeing McEwan performing an operation to remove a brain tumour. However, he expresses concern about the delay in the correct diagnosis in this patient, who sees three doctors and is given useless tonics before the diagnosis is made by McEwan. This is a recurrent theme in *The Citadel* (1937) and leads to Cronin's strong concerns regarding the administration of medicines which lacked any evidence base.

Cronin received honours from McEwan in his Surgery finals, but McEwan declined Cronin's request to appoint him as his dresser (equivalent today of a junior trainee). McEwan advised 'You might succeed in some branch of medicine, but of one thing I am sure you will never be a surgeon'.⁹⁷ This is likely to have been a disappointment for Cronin as he had worked hard to impress McEwan. It is not clear why McEwan came to that view. It may be that he felt that Cronin's strengths lay in academic medicine, or he was not impressed by his hand skills. Cronin does not provide any explanation regarding this rejection. He also speaks in *Adventures in Two Worlds*⁹⁸ of working at Lochlea Asylum four miles west of Glasgow. After email correspondence with the then Archivist NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Alistair Tough), it is likely that this was Royal Gartnavel Mental Asylum.⁹⁹ His brief time there clearly made an impression on Cronin as he refers to a psychotic episode in both *Adventures in Two Worlds*¹⁰⁰ and *A Song of Sixpence*¹⁰¹ (1964)¹⁰². Cronin was an outstanding student at the University of Glasgow and his determination to succeed was due partly to his work ethic, but also not to disappoint his mother who had brought him up in such difficult circumstances. He mentioned to his mother that a number of the students spent time playing cards to which she replied, 'Don't mix with any but the best.'¹⁰³ He graduated as the second best student in the year and gained numerous distinctions including all his final year subjects.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 12-14.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.15.

⁹⁸ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, p.16.

⁹⁹ Alistair Tough also told me in an email (3 March,2020) that a colleague (probably Rev.Derek Hailey) pointed out to him a bedroom over the entrance archway at Gartnavel Royal that had been occupied by Cronin. With permission.

¹⁰⁰ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, pp. 21-23.

¹⁰¹ A. J. Cronin, *A Song of Sixpence* (Heinemann, 1973), p.152.

¹⁰² A. J. Cronin, *A Song of Sixpence* (Gollancz, 1964).

¹⁰³ National Library of Scotland, Acc.10106/18-19.

¹⁰⁴ University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, GB248 MED5/2/11, (1918-1919).

Cronin's graduation with commendation indicates consistently excellent results throughout the course and reflects Cronin's considerable application and ability, especially as his course was curtailed by a year because of his military service.¹⁰⁵ It also showed his desire to reward his mother, who had sacrificed so much to secure his entry to Glasgow University.

1.3 Influence of A. J. Cronin's Early Life on his Writings

Cronin as a young boy experienced the hostilities to Catholics of an Irish background in Scotland and draws attention to this in a number of his books. In *Hatter's Castle*, James Brodie, the hatter, detests the Catholic boyfriend of his daughter and brutally throws her out of the house when he hears that she is pregnant. Cronin's characters are mocked as young boys because of their Catholic faith in *The Green Years* (1944) and in *Adventures in Two Worlds* (1952). In *A Song of Sixpence* (1964), the hero Lawrence Carroll is branded at the age of six 'The Wee Pope',¹⁰⁶ and Cronin also details the challenges of a Catholic boy living in a Presbyterian household in *The Green Years*¹⁰⁷, where Robert Shannon is ridiculed 'for being a dirty little papist'.¹⁰⁸ This novel appears to have been drawn from Cronin's own experiences following the death of his father. In *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1941),¹⁰⁹ the main character's Irish Catholic father is badly beaten by a Protestant mob and dies shortly thereafter, together with the boy's mother as she attempts to carry him home via a collapsing bridge. Cronin's early life shortly preceded the 1923 report of the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation committee on *The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality* and the view expressed therein that Irish immigrants should be deported back to Ireland.¹¹⁰ Many of Cronin's novels place emphasis on the religious aspect of his upbringing and mixed marriages which both he and his mother experienced. This was stigmatised and deeply unpopular on both sides of the religious divide in Scotland, and this theme was evident throughout the forty-six year span of his writings, and is graphically illustrated in his second book, *Three Loves* (1933).¹¹¹ This

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ A. J. Cronin, *A Song of Sixpence*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ A. J. Cronin, *The Green Years*, (Gollancz, 1944).

¹⁰⁸ A. J. Cronin, *The Green Years*, first cheap edition (Gollancz, 1949), p. 34.

¹⁰⁹ A. J. Cronin, *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1941).

¹¹⁰ *Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality*: Committee to Consider Overtures From The Presbytery of Glasgow and from the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. 23 May 1923, on Irish Immigration and the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918, pp. 750-61.

¹¹¹ A. J. Cronin, *Three Loves* (Gollancz, 1932).

begins by focussing on a family similar to Cronin's as a child with his mother being Presbyterian and his father an Irish Catholic. His mother's brother states early in the book:

They came to Scotland these Irish to beget their prolific progeny, a mongrel breed: supplying chiefly the navvy and the labourer or, in its higher flights the bookmaker and the publican, a race, unwanted and uncouth.¹¹²

This view was not surprising at that time as sectarianism against Catholics was rife and indeed persisted well in to the twentieth century.¹¹³ The decision of Cronin's now Catholic mother to transfer him to St Aloysius' College from Dumbarton Academy emphasised her ambition to help him to succeed academically as well as to be exposed to a Catholic ethos. As St.Aloysius' College was a fee paying school, help in this regard may have come from two uncles on the Cronin side, one of whom, Francis Cronin, was a highly respected priest in the Archdiocese of Glasgow.¹¹⁴ His Obituary states that: 'During his college career, he won the affection and esteem of his superiors and fellow-students by his outstanding ability and charming manner, and already displayed these manly traits of character which marked his subsequent career.'¹¹⁵ Cronin stayed with this uncle for a period around the time of his father's death and spoke very fondly of that time.¹¹⁶ In addition, Cronin states that this experience continued to be an influence on his life and works.¹¹⁷ Although Cronin was apathetic regarding his faith as a university student and young doctor, this changed when he witnessed the hardship of miners in South Wales:

But when I qualified as a young doctor I went out in the world, to the mining valleys of South Wales and in the practice of my profession saw life at first hand, observed the courage and good humour of my fellow creatures struggling under great hardships. For the first time, I began to penetrate into the realm of the spirit - through the slow pangs of experience, new values became

¹¹² Ibid, p. 20.

¹¹³ T. M. Devine, '*Scotland's Shame: Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland*', ed. by T. M. Devine (Mainstream Publishing Company, 2000) p. 71.

¹¹⁴ [Anon.], 'Francis Cronin: Obituary'. *Scottish Catholic Directory*, 1919, pp. 270-271.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ A. J. Cronin, Unpublished Autobiography.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

apparent to me. I realised that the compass of existence held more than my textbooks had revealed, more than I had ever dreamed of. In short I lost my superiority, and this, though I was not aware of it, is the first step towards finding God.¹¹⁸

Here Cronin is conceding that he had held too high an opinion of himself, and we see this narrative reflected also in *The Citadel*, where the principal character temporarily forsakes his medical principles in the pursuit of money and social status. In the rekindling of his faith, Cronin quotes in *Adventures in Two Worlds* from *The Hound of Heaven* by Francis Thomson:

I fled him down the nights and down the day
down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind
in the midst of tears and running laughter.¹¹⁹

Cronin's moral and philosophical views are expressed in *Adventures in Two Worlds* in the last two chapters, where he documents his views on religion and good living and details his struggles with Catholicism.¹²⁰ He speaks of a period of apathy and then discusses re-engagement with religion and the need to commit to his faith:

All human suffering is an act of repentance, a single contrite tear, one cry out of the depths is enough. The publican kneeling far back in the shadows of the temple, had but to bow his head in sorrow; 'O lord be merciful to me a sinner'. This is the supreme prayer... the prayer for me... surely the prayer for all of us.¹²¹

Because of the religious challenges Cronin experienced in childhood, he uses *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1941) to promote tolerance and acceptance of people with beliefs which differed from his own through the hero Fr. Francis Chisholm.¹²² Such sentiments were not popular with the Church establishment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The whole concept of repentance and redemption, which are major tenets of the Catholic faith, would have been emphasised to Cronin in his early life. His temporary departure from the Church and his obsession with

¹¹⁸ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, pp. 280.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 593–611.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 611.

¹²² A. J. Cronin, *The Keys of the Kingdom*.

materialism, with loss of his medical principles, drove him to seek repentance.¹²³ This becomes a component in many of his novels. In *The Citadel*, Dr Andrew Manson seeks redemption by retreating from private practice to a group practice in the Midlands. In *The Minstrel Boy* (1975), Desmonde, who has an affair as a priest, seeks redemption by going to the missions.¹²⁴ In *The Judas Tree* (1961), the principal character's quest for redemption ultimately fails for material reasons and he despairs and takes his own life.

Another element in Cronin's early life which pervades his novels is what has been described as dark sexuality.¹²⁵ Sin and in particular of a sexual nature were looked on severely by the Catholic Church and young women who became pregnant out of wedlock were ostracised and their infants taken to a children's home or placed for adoption. Other Christian denominations also strongly disapproved of pre-marital intercourse and subsequent pregnancy and there was a stigma attached to those involved and their families. Cronin was born two months after his parents were married and his own marriage was precipitated by the possibility of his future wife being pregnant.¹²⁶ This scenario recurs in Cronin's novels and in addition, observations of sexual nuance are often made. For example in *The Judas Tree*¹²⁷, the narrator states after offering a young lady a lift on his motor bike: 'She hesitated, then swung one leg across modestly yet so inexpertly that before he averted his eyes, a sweet prospect was momentarily revealed to him.'¹²⁸ On occasion a sexual encounter emerges fairly early in the relationships after a convivial meal with alcohol with the main male character taking the lead as a willing though more passive participant. In *The Citadel*, after a night out with socialite Frances Lawrence, Manson is unable to resist her invitation to return to her house and is troubled: 'As he followed, sneaking after her, he had a fading vision of Christine's figure (his wife) walking down the market, carrying her old string bag.'¹²⁹ In his unpublished autobiography,¹³⁰ Cronin describes a long alcohol fuelled lunch with his future wife followed by her taking the lead in

¹²³ Cronin states in *Adventures in Two Worlds* that the poverty of his early life led him to seek riches, high position and fame as his dominant passion.

¹²⁴ A. J. Cronin, *The Minstrel Boy* (Gollancz, 1975).

¹²⁵ Gerard Carruthers, 'Losing His Religion: The Neglected Catholicism of A. J. Cronin', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 45 (2019), 42-46.

¹²⁶ A. J. Cronin, Unpublished Autobiography.

¹²⁷ A. J. Cronin, *The Judas Tree* (Gollancz, 1961).

¹²⁸ A. J. Cronin, *The Judas Tree*, sixth impression (Gollancz, 1976) p. 66.

¹²⁹ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 361.

¹³⁰ A. J. Cronin, Unpublished Autobiography.

making love with the resultant concern about pregnancy and marriage shortly thereafter. Thus Cronin reveals in both his unpublished autobiography and in his novels a tension between the constraints dictated by his religion and the impact on his life of his own pre-marital sexual encounter. He further states in his unpublished autobiography, on visiting a priest in Wales:

At the Catholic Church near Cardiff, I told him I had behaved foolishly and sinfully, that I had abandoned my own church to marry a woman I did not love, that I brutally hurt my dear mother whom I deeply loved and to whom I owed so much, that I had betrayed my teachers and good education they had given me.¹³¹

Cronin was warned by a Church of Scotland minister who was a friend of his wife's family the day following his marriage that:

Agnes is a very sensitive, nervy highly strung lass. If she's treated nicely and quietly and calmly, she will be as right as rain. But if she is not so treated and is used roughly or angrily or, he hesitated, given too much sex, especially when she is not in the mood, then you will be in trouble.¹³²

This revelation shocked Cronin who then discovered that his wife was not after all pregnant. However Cronin had by then committed himself to the marriage and because of his religious views would never have contemplated divorce.

The issues of his Christian faith, childhood poverty, the sacrifices of his mother and his determination to be wealthy all prevail and indeed recur in Cronin's novels. These themes are by no means restricted to the early novels and indeed his last novel, *The Minstrel Boy* (1975) begins with many accurate reflections of his time at St Aloysius College some sixty years earlier. The thesis will further reflect on these themes in chapter four where relevant novels other than *The Citadel* are discussed.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

Chapter 2:

Cronin's Medical Career and the Delivery of Health Care in the Early Twentieth Century: The influence of his Medical Background on his Writings

2.1 **Medical Career** (1919-1930)

On graduation, Cronin spent a brief period as ship's doctor on a trip to India. His future wife was unhappy about this trip including concerns about him meeting other women. She hoped it would help him to clear his mind ahead of their marriage.¹ He was then appointed to Bellahouston Fever Hospital which was a Public Health Hospital and is no longer in existence. Thereafter, he worked as Medical Superintendent at Lightburn Hospital which also was a Public Health Hospital and is now a care of the elderly hospital. His impending marriage meant that he had to relinquish this post as it was only available to unmarried men. Cronin recalls being taken to the train station on his last day by a staff member at Lightburn and being told: 'This is a sad day for all of us at Lightburn. We never had a doctor that was as well liked as you.'² There is circumstantial evidence that he then worked briefly as a GP in Garelochhead, where the seeds of *Dr Finlay's Casebook* were sown.³ Following their marriage, Cronin and his wife left for Treherbert in South Wales. This was an unhappy time as Mrs Cronin did not find the town or the accommodation attractive and he was poorly paid and was disappointed by the lack of medical facilities.⁴ After a few months, the couple moved to Tredegar where Cronin was appointed to the Tredegar Medical Aid Society (TMAS). Under this scheme, the miners paid a small contribution from their salaries towards the running of the society. Cronin's salary was paid from the scheme and, although not substantially increased

¹ National Library of Scotland, Acc.10106/18-19.

² A. J. Cronin, Unpublished Autobiography.

³ Dr James Mckelvie told me in an email of 5 May 2020: 'When I worked as a GP in Garelochhead, there was a partly retired Parish Priest who ran the local Catholic Church and who lived in Dunivard House, Garelochhead. He had a direct connection with Cronin and thought he had officiated at his brother's funeral. Dunivard house was believed to be not only the doctor's house in 1920 but the location where Cronin served as a locum GP. He showed me round a large house with a commodious front room and a surgery room next to the front door leading on to a large garden. The next door house is still called Rannochbrae and is on the road leading to Garelochhead station. While this remains circumstantial evidence, the location of a number of Cronin's short stories tie within the village of Garelochhead.' With permission.

Comment : The statement regarding his brother is mistaken as Cronin did not have a brother. It could have been another relative.

⁴ A. J. Cronin, Unpublished Autobiography.

from his previous post, he was impressed by the setup. The society was founded in 1890 after the amalgamation of several existing local medical aid groups. Following an additional small annual levy from the members, a general hospital was built in 1904 and a surgery in 1911.⁵

Cronin was impressed by the secretary of the society Mr Walter Conway (1873-1933),⁶ who had been heavily involved since the 1890s and was secretary from 1915 until his death. He was a mentor to Aneurin Bevan and revered within the town. He started the socialist Query Club in 1920 and Bevan was also a founder member. The inscription on Conway's tombstone read: 'Greatly beloved, he followed in the footsteps of the master.'

Cronin was a respected doctor there but acknowledged that he had much to learn from Dr Davies, the principal doctor at the TMAS. Cronin's wife mentions that Cronin did not like it when his senior upstaged him on a diagnosis and thereafter he was determined to end up with more degrees than Dr Davies.⁷ Cronin stated in his Unpublished Autobiography that Davies was an exceptional man and that he could not fully express the admiration and regard he had for his senior colleague.⁸ Cronin showed his drive and talent by achieving a Doctorate of Medicine (MD), entitled *The History of Aneurysm*.⁹ An MD from his Alma Mater would have involved a considerable amount of time, talent and effort and was most unusual for someone at a young age who was also working full time. In addition he was successful in being awarded Membership of the Royal College of Physicians of London, which all but guaranteed a successful and lucrative career in medicine. Andrew Manson in *The Citadel* achieved almost identical success, achieving an MD and a Membership. The MD was on the topic of dust inhalation¹⁰ which Cronin published a paper on. The key to Manson's success in passing the Membership was his knowledge of the history of aneurysm.¹¹

⁵ Gareth Jones, 'The Aneurin Bevan Inheritance; the Story of the Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust. Abertillery' (*Old Bakehouse Press*, 1998), p. 11.

⁶ Mr Owen in *The Citadel* and George Conway in *Adventures in Two Worlds*.

⁷ National Library of Scotland, Acc.10106/18-19.

⁸ A. J. Cronin, Unpublished Autobiography.

⁹ A. J. Cronin, 'The History of Aneurysm' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, July 1925).

¹⁰ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 226.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Cronin was in Tredegar from 1921 to 1924 and, although he seemed happy there, he was attracted to the position of UK Inspector of Mines, which he felt would allow him to research his interest in lung disease among miners. During his time as Inspector, he published two papers, which addressed Dust Inhalation in haematite mines¹² and First Aid Organisation at collieries in Great Britain.¹³ Cronin was enthused by the study on dust inhalation and his key finding formed the basis for an official report explaining why lung problems were common in iron-ore miners. In this regard, Ruth Richardson states:

The ‘noise, vibration and peculiar smell’ of the dust laden atmosphere at the bottom of the new unventilated shaft, Cronin found ‘exceedingly oppressive.’ New power drills had no irrigant and dust flew back into the driller’s face.¹⁴

This report was evidently suppressed because of the influence mine owners had over the Government.¹⁵ However Cronin circumvented this by having the article published in an appropriate journal. The second project which involved visitations to over 500 privately owned mines, to assess first-aid facilities, revealed that only 8% had first-rate first aid equipment. The Department of Mines stifled Cronin’s proposals for new regulations to improve this, precipitating his resignation as Inspector of Mines. This led to him stating that he felt like ‘a fish out of water’ and was worn down by the bureaucracy, Government inertia and vested interests.¹⁶ This issue clearly influenced Cronin’s thinking in regard to Government-controlled organisations and will be revisited in chapter five.

Cronin left his position as Inspector of Mines in 1926 to pursue a career in private general practice (GP) in London. He had very little capital and could only afford a rundown practice in Bayswater offered to him at half price. This was a challenging time for the Cronins and Mrs Cronin specifically mentions their difficulties with a young child, an ongoing pregnancy and little money.¹⁷

¹² A. J. Cronin, ‘Report on Dust Inhalation in Haematite Mines’, *Journal of Industrial Hygiene*, 8 (1926), 7-11.

¹³ A. J. Cronin, ‘An Investigation into First-Aid Organisation at Collieries in Great Britain’ (HMSO, 1927), No 19282700506.

¹⁴ Ruth Richardson, ‘The Art of Medicine: A. J. Cronin’s *The Citadel*’, *The Lancet*, 386, 2016, 2284-2285.

¹⁵ Ruth Richardson. Personal Communication, March 10, 2021. I am grateful to Dr Richardson for providing information on these two reports which had proved elusive in accessing.

¹⁶ National Library of Scotland, Acc.10106/18-19.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Gradually Cronin built up an impressive practice and yet he became disillusioned with the way he practised, charging large fees to malingerers and dispensing medications of no proven value. In financial terms he was successful and enjoyed moving within the higher echelons of London society. His wife also enjoyed their lifestyle but she did observe an unwelcome change in her husband's approach and in his prescription of useless drugs for financial gain and told him: 'You thought more and more of your patients and less and less of your guineas in Tredegar.'¹⁸ Cronin initially was angry at this suggestion but then reflected and said, 'Perhaps you are right.'¹⁹ Thereafter he saw it as a point of honour to treat financially less-well-off patients (panel patients), who were assigned to GPs for care without charge due to their impoverished state.²⁰

In 1930, Cronin requested a medical consultation because of indigestion which had been an intermittent problem in his earlier life. The diagnosis was a duodenal ulcer and the advice, to his incredulity, was six months rest and a bland diet. Initially, because of the financial success of the practice, Cronin felt this advice was not possible to follow, but on reflection, he saw it as an opportunity to pursue an as yet unfulfilled ambition to become an author. The fact that he sold his practice in London before leaving for Scotland suggested that he did not intend to return to medicine. In addition, his Unpublished Autobiography mentions that a factor in his decision was the considerable amount of money he made from an investment tip off, allowing him the luxury of writing without any short term financial concerns.²¹ He subsequently stated in a letter to Victor Gollancz of the need to 'escape from the neat little pathways of the practice of medicine into the unconfined and infinitely more attractive pastures of literary art'.²² The family moved to Dalchenna Farm near Inveraray in one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland and it was there that he began writing *Hatter's Castle* (1931). At one point he was so dejected with the novel, that he chose to throw it away. He thereafter went for a walk and a philosophical discussion with a local farmer provided him with the resolve to complete the novel.²³ He was astounded by its success and was to become one of the most prolific and successful Scottish authors of the twentieth century. Between

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ A. J. Cronin, Unpublished Autobiography.

²² A. J. Cronin, Letter to Victor Gollancz, 11 November 1931, Orion Archives, in Alan Davies., p. 89.

²³ A. J. Cronin, 'The Turning Point of my Career', *Reader's Digest*, June 1941, pp. 54-58.

1930 and 1978, he wrote twenty-five novels, two novellas and numerous articles and was never to return to medicine.

2.2 Health Care During Cronin's Early Life and Medical Career

The Voluntary Hospitals in Glasgow where Cronin would have trained as a student were the Royal, Western and Victoria Infirmaries. These hospitals were staffed by doctors who worked without remuneration and depended on private practice for their income. These hospitals were financed through fund raising and voluntary contributions and the patients were of low or no income with the middle and upper classes encouraged to use the private sector, where such hospitals also made a significant contribution to emergency care through a first aid network. The Public Health Hospitals provided care for patients with infectious disease, known as fever hospitals, and were the responsibility of the Public Health Authority who were obliged to provide and finance such hospitals: e.g. Ruchill, Belvidere and Bellahouston. They served to isolate patients with communicable diseases and provided treatment for tuberculosis and other contagious diseases such as small pox and diphtheria. The Parish Council Hospitals (Municipal Hospitals in England) were responsible for providing relief for the sick poor, the aged and those who were homeless or unable to take care of themselves. These hospitals were under the control of Parish Councils which were created under the Local Government Act of 1894 as successors to the Parochial Boards.²⁴ The Councils were well aware of the appalling housing conditions of the poor and hence the need to improve hospital and poor housing accommodation.

Primary Care was provided by self-employed private practitioners (General Practitioners or GPs). Attendance at the GP necessitated the payment of a fee and therefore poorer sections of society were inclined to avoid their GP unless they had developed an acute illness. GPs would at times waive their fees for the poor but still made a satisfactory salary from the better off. A number of other initiatives were being developed within General Practice around that time including the Pioneer Health Centre known as The Peckham Experiment which opened in London in 1926 and was funded by weekly subscriptions of one shilling.²⁵ Such forward thinking was illustrated by combining medical care with the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, where surgeries were created along with community swimming pools and dance halls. The Peckham Experiment was so successful that it closed in 1929, to enable a rebuild and expansion which was completed by 1935.

²⁴ Local Government (Scotland) Act 1894, c.58.

²⁵ Pearse, I. H., Crocker, L.H., *The Peckham Experiment* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1943).

World War Two led to a suspension of the Centre and it was restarted in 1946, although it did not survive once the NHS was established. The National Insurance Act of 1911²⁶ brought about significant change in that manual labourers and those on salaries under a certain income were allowed free access to their GP, as were pregnant women and patients with tuberculosis. Gradually the salary limit for free access to health care was increased so that by 1936, this scheme included half of the adult population in the UK.

When Cronin graduated, there was no postgraduate training, very little support for patients with low salaries and in Scotland no adequately developed insurance systems except the Highlands and Islands Medical Service (HIMS).²⁷ This was necessary as it was not possible to implement the English-based insurance system because of the rural nature of much of Scotland. The HIMS provided a form of socialised health care based on contributions of its users in the remoter parts of Scotland. Another example of provision of health care for a local population, which Cronin had personal experience of, was the Tredegar Medical Aid Society. This is highly relevant in regard to the links between Cronin and the founding of the NHS and will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

2.3 The Influence of Cronin's Medical Career on his Writings

The eleven years Cronin spent as a doctor profoundly influenced his writings. Indeed it is hard to find any of his novels which do not have a doctor as one of the key characters, or medical anecdotes from Cronin's own experience. Furthermore a number of his articles in periodicals comprise medical reminiscences and his views on healthcare. One in particular was entitled 'Socialised Medicine',²⁸ which has only emerged thanks to the Cronin family and will be analysed in detail in chapter five.

Cronin effectively draws on all aspects of his medical training and time as a doctor to inform his writings. For example, in *Adventures in Two Worlds*,²⁹ he recalls from his time in Dublin, the tragic story of a young mother losing her life to pneumonia. This incident, like others in Cronin's novels, involves economic hardship which made a deep long-lasting impression on Cronin. He had as a student observed the inadequacies of many treatments and the blind faith doctors had in these.

²⁶ National Insurance Act, December 16 1911, c. 55.

²⁷ Dewar Report: *Report of the Highlands and Islands Medical Services Committee*, 1912, Cmd 6559.

²⁸ A. J. Cronin, 'Socialised Medicine', *The Listener*, December 1937, pp.1359-1360.

²⁹ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, pp. 24-28.

This was exemplified by the failure to diagnose and adequately manage the woman with a brain tumour previously mentioned.³⁰ The two years Cronin spent in fever hospitals were dominated by tuberculosis, which claimed the life of his father. The impact this had on him is evidenced by the number of times in his novels that the main character loses one or both parents to tuberculosis. As well as displaying his detailed medical knowledge, Cronin effectively uses patients who presented during his time as a medical student and doctor to inform his novels. It is relatively easy to match his ‘fictional characters’ with doctors and other health workers in his student and postgraduate days. In addition many places are referred to by their real names or with a slight variation.³¹

Cronin also uses patient interaction to excellent effect in his novels. This varies between being deeply impressed by the fortitude and bravery of some to dismissiveness to others whom he perceives as malingerers, attempting to manipulate the system to their own benefit. One example of this is in *The Citadel* when Andrew Manson refuses to give one of the miners a medical certificate to justify staying off work although Manson’s predecessor had never refused a certificate in seven years. Manson is confronted with an overweight, brusque miner, smelling of alcohol and is unable to find any justification for the miner being unable to work. The certificate reads, ‘This is to certify that Ben Chenkin is suffering from the effects of over indulgence in malt liquors but is perfectly fit to work.’³² The miner and some of his colleagues who are on the committee are incensed. On another occasion, Manson has no hesitation in removing and then replacing a dressing applied by the formidable district nurse. The nurse storms out and the family take themselves off his list and opt to accept the nurse’s more antiquated advice. Cronin displays excellent use of his knowledge of medicine to provide authenticity to this writing. This is not to say that medical themes cannot be explored by non-medical authors. Following the publication of *The Citadel*, an editorial expressed the view that the great medical novels were written by those outside the profession and surmised

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 15-24.

³¹ At times Cronin also use the real name or a variation which allows identity of a place or person. For example, in *The Minstrel Boy* (1975) he refers to St. Aloysius’ College as St Ignatius’ College. He retains the name of Stonyhurst College in that book. In *A Song of Sixpence* (1964), he speaks of Amplehurst which is a mixture of Ampleforth and Stonyhurst. There are examples of authentic names of people and places and a mixture of authentic and altered names. (eg Dr Davies, Lord Dawson of Penn and Aneurin Bevan all correctly named.) The use of real life names adds to the autobiographical feel of *The Minstrel Boy* and *Adventures in Two Worlds*. Cronin’s son Patrick studied cardiology in London and his chief Sir John McMichael remarked that he had to be careful in his language and attitude or he would find himself in one of A. J. Cronin’s books: In Krishna Somers, ‘Robert Francis Patrick Cronin’, *Monks’s Roll, Royal College of Physicians of London*, 2007, Vol. 12. <https://history.rcplondon.ac.uk/inspiring-physicians/robert-francis-patrick-cronin>.

³² A.J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, pp.136-137.

that doctors were too close to their own work to write a first class medical novel.³³ Perhaps this editorial had the non-medical Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith* (1925) in mind when they made this assertion.³⁴ This novel displays a considerable amount of knowledge of laboratory medicine though with the assistance of a science writer³⁵ and has been frequently compared to *The Citadel*. However Cronin displayed details of diseases and patient interactions which would have been a considerable challenge for a non-medical author. His description of Myxoedematous Madness³⁶ is regarded within the medical profession as a classic and there are other examples in Cronin's novels in which the accuracy of his writing has an authenticity which has been recognised by the medical profession, directly contributing to the popularity of his novels.

Cronin also addresses in his novels the tension which he creates between the moral principles of his faith and his clinical practice. For example, he shows little tolerance for hypocritical ministers of religion whose self-interest is at odds with their directives from the pulpit. In one incident in *The Citadel*, the local minister consults him about his desire not to have children for the time being. Manson, whose wife had a miscarriage after a fall, reacts adversely and tells the minister to 'Get out quick you dirty little man of God'.³⁷ He also abhors a request in *Adventures in Two Worlds* to facilitate an abortion and states: 'Once a Doctor embarks upon a career as an abortionist, he is irretrievably lost.'³⁸ It is evident that Cronin's writings were fundamentally driven by his own experiences as a doctor, in *The Citadel*, and to some extent in all his novels. These medical experiences are intertwined with his religious and societal views and it is this mix which makes his storytelling so appealing. Cronin's exposure of hypocrisy and moral self-righteousness may also have contributed to his novels' popular appeal.

As will be evident on analysis of *The Citadel*, Cronin's medical background facilitates his ability to look critically at health care and the inadequate provision for training young doctors. This novel also demonstrates the unscrupulous behaviour of some private sector based doctors whose

³³ [Anon.], 'The Citadel', Editorial, *The Journal Of the American Medical Association*, 109 (1937), 956-957.

³⁴ Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith* (Harcourt, Brace and Co.1925).

³⁵ H. M. Fangarau, 'The Novel *Arrowsmith*, Paul de Kruif and Jacques Loeb: a Literary Portrait of Medical Science', *Medical Humanities*, 32(2006), 82-87.

³⁶ R. Asher, 'Myxoedematous Madness', *British Medical Journal*, 4627, (1949), 555-562.

³⁷ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 216.

³⁸ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, p. 431.

care of patients is compromised by their financially driven approach at the expense of good clinical care. This will be reflected on further in chapter five.

Chapter 3:

The Making of *The Citadel* and Its Reception

3.1 Background and Plot

Cronin had initially entitled this novel *Dr Manson MD* and subsequently E. E. Edgett stated: ‘Not even by the furthest stretch of the imagination can such a title as *The Citadel* have the slightest suggestion of the nature and trend of the story.’¹ There is no clear account from Cronin as to why the new title was chosen. The author does not mention the word ‘citadel’ once in the text of the novel although the wife of the novel’s hero Andrew Manson alludes to it when she states:

Don’t you remember how you used to speak of life, that it was an attack on the unknown, an assault uphill-as though you had to take some castle that you knew was there but could not see, on the top.²

Manson in the final page of the novel visits his wife’s grave and sees a bank of cloud ‘bearing the shape of battlements’,³ which is the title of biographer Dale Salwak’s Chapter on *The Citadel*.⁴ Salwak then states that in his view the title *The Citadel* represents the ideals to which Manson aspires — medical competency and integrity.⁵ It is therefore reasonable to infer that Cronin used this title to suggest some difficult to attain medical pinnacle, accomplished only by considerable effort, or a difficult to conquer mountain-top enemy-occupied castle. He could also have used it to indicate that this was the impregnable central fortified area or core of the medical profession such as the Royal College of Physicians, the British Medical Association (BMA) or the medical establishment in general. Cronin may have wished to convey the view that the establishment considered itself to be beyond criticism, scrutiny and reproach and also defended itself against reform and criticism. Despite this, the title did not enthuse Cronin and he wrote to his publisher as

¹ Edwin Francis Edgett, ‘A Novel about a Doctor’, *Boston Evening Transcript*, 1 September 1937, p. 12.

² Dr A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 335.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

⁴ Dale Salwak, pp. 60-72.

⁵ *Citadel* is mentioned twice in the 1982 BBC series. On the first occasion a medical friend Philip Denny states ‘You want me to point you to those sunny uplands and to the valley of professional death — up there to that citadel’. In that same series, Manson’s wife states after expressing concerns about Andrew’s mercenary approach to his work, ‘When I looked up citadel in the dictionary it is a castle on a hill something you take by assault by hurting people.’ This did not go down well with Andrew who tells Christine she might have been better marrying a missionary. ‘Citadel’ is also mentioned along similar lines in the 1938 film version.

he prepared the final draft of the novel: 'I have great joy over everything but the title. I don't like *The Citadel*; though it expresses the meaning of the novel. It is too cold and I think suggests a war novel. I will find a better one,' but he never did.⁶

The novel charts the progress of Andrew Manson, a young talented doctor, through a variety of medical posts over an eleven year period. He arrives in South Wales having just graduated from the University of St Andrews as the year's most distinguished student. There are many aspects of the novel which reflect the eleven years Cronin spent as a doctor.⁷ Manson's initial position was in South Wales working as an assistant to Dr Page, a senior GP, who is bedridden following a stroke. The practice is controlled by Dr Page's wife with whom Andrew fails to establish a working relationship and two incidents lead to an irretrievable breakdown in their relationship. The first is when she inappropriately brings her husband down to the front porch and he clearly is distressed at being out on a windy day. Manson is horrified by such behaviour seeing it as an attempt by Mrs Page to demonstrate that her husband is recovering. The second is when Mrs Page accuses Manson of impropriety following receipt of a financial gift from a patient's relative. In the first edition, Manson describes Mrs Page as a 'mean, guzzling, mercenary bitch. In fact you are a pathological case'.⁸ This led, as previously noted, to a complaint of libel by the wife of the local GP. As a consequence, in subsequent editions, Mrs Page, the wife, became Miss Page, the sister, and the comments were toned down with Manson saying, 'You're a good woman I have no doubt, but to my mind you are a misguided one and if we spent 1000 years together we would never agree.'⁹ Manson resigns and applies for a post with a nearby Medical Aid Society. He is not the favoured candidate but impresses the committee who are in receipt of an excellent reference from his old boss Dr Page. The society offers Manson the post but informs him that the position can only go to a married man. He had been seeing a local teacher and, when confronted with this hurdle, he announces to the panel that he is engaged and thereafter proposes to his girl friend who accepts.

Manson develops a good reputation at the Medical Aid Society as a caring and competent doctor and his reputation is enhanced by reviving an apparently dead baby and saving the life of a

⁶ Sheila Hodges, *The Story of a Publishing House* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), p. 72.

⁷ Cronin was also in Wales for a similar time, employed there by a Medical Aid Society and then by the Mining Board before spending four years in Private Practice in London.

⁸ Dr A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 100.

⁹ Dr A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel: The Cronin Omnibus* (Victor Gollancz, 1994), p. 528.

miner named Sam Bevan¹⁰ by performing an arm amputation. Manson introduces vaccines and is reluctant to prescribe drugs of no proven value. However he is not popular with everyone, being reluctant to sign off miners whom he feels are malingerers. In addition, he makes an enemy of one of the local ministers and antagonises the senior doctor by questioning his practice of taking a percentage payment from his junior colleagues. The final straw comes when the minister and others object to Manson's research into lung disease in miners through experiments on guinea pigs. As he has not obtained a licence for such work, he is reported to the committee and despite support from the secretary, resigns. However, as a result of his research, Manson is approached to consider the position of medical officer for the Coal and Mining Board. This post is a springboard for his ongoing research but the bureaucracy of the organisation prevents that and he is given what he regards as meaningless tasks. Here we see signs of Cronin through Andrew Manson expressing his antipathy towards bureaucratic organisations.

Manson decides to return to General Practice and begins searching for a practice that suits his precarious financial situation. He states that because of his three postgraduate degrees, he wants a non-panel practice, free of the tyranny of the card system (known as the Panel). Non-panel patients did not require insurance as they were the well off in society whereas panel patients were provided with health care insurance from contributions from themselves, their employer and the Government. This insurance system also made provision for the unemployed who were a group that Aneurin Bevan felt passionately about in his quest for a free NHS for all.¹¹ However, as I will discuss in chapter five, Bevan was not in favour of the new system being insurance based.¹² Manson eventually finds a practice in a run down area and has to compromise on the issue of seeing panel patients. Business is initially slow but gradually he builds up a good practice, making inroads into the more wealthy patients. He becomes obsessed with making money and is less principled in the delivery of care. He prescribes unnecessary and ineffective drugs and sees patients more regularly than is necessary. His wife becomes concerned and eventually says, after he receives money for an injection he knows is useless: 'Isn't that the stuff I've heard you run down so much?' This angers Andrew and he responds, 'Blast it Chris you're never satisfied!'¹³ Their relationship deteriorates, he

¹⁰ An interesting choice of name given Aneurin Bevan's links with Tredegar.

¹¹ John Launer, 407-408.

¹² The PEP report on the British health services II: National health insurance. *British Medical Journal*, S37 (1938), pp. 39-42.

¹³ Dr A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 288.

has an affair with a society lady and befriends unprincipled doctors, one of whom botches an operation with the resultant death of the patient. Manson assists at the operation and is horrified by the technical incompetence, the subsequent cover up and the deception to the family. This incident brings a radical change in Manson's views and he decides to sell the practice.

In the meantime he is approached by an old friend who asks him to see his daughter who is desperately ill from tuberculosis. Andrew enlists the help of a non-medical scientist who is an expert in a non-approved surgical treatment. Andrew assists him at the operation and the patient improves but when his estranged colleagues in London hear of this, they report him to the General Medical Council (GMC). He is accused of breaching GMC rules by enlisting the help of an unqualified person and therefore being guilty of infamous conduct in a professional respect. Prior to the GMC hearing, his wife dies in a road accident, just after they have been reconciled and he has apologised for the error of his ways. The GMC court scene is the climax of the book with the case against Manson seemingly cut and dried. However, he is helped by the evidence of the young patient now recovering from tuberculosis and by his impassioned speech in which he highlights the defects of postgraduate training and the widespread use of unproven drugs for financial gain. He argues for a structured system of postgraduate training and for the opportunity to bring science to the forefront. He also proposes doing away with the bottle-of-medicine idea (prescribing without adequately working out the clinical diagnosis) and giving every practitioner a chance to study and to cooperate in research. He argues for better pay and conditions for nurses and for an appreciation of the great advances led by researchers, some of whom are not medically qualified. He wins over the committee, is exonerated and leaves to start a new group practice with two friends.

In summary, several key medical deficiencies emerge from the novel. The first is the failure to adequately scrutinise the competence and financial motivation of doctors. The second is the absence of any evidence base for medications. Thirdly, there is the non existence of a structured medical postgraduate education and support and finally there is the lack of any UK wide joined up system of health care resulting in inequity in the delivery of health care, to the disadvantage of the less well off in society.

3.2 Cronin and his publisher Victor Gollancz

Victor Gollancz (1893-1967) was a passionate socialist and talented publisher whose career began at the firm of Benn brothers. In 1927 he moved to start his own firm after a fallout with Benn. Gollancz wanted co-ownership of the group and was strong and unyielding in his bargaining but Benn was not prepared to agree to Gollancz's demands. In addition Benn was politically moving to

the right and Gollancz was consolidating his credentials as a left wing socialist and thoroughly disapproved of Benn's book *Confessions of a Capitalist*.¹⁴ However, this may have not been as important as financial and reputational considerations for Gollancz.¹⁵ Benn did acknowledge that Gollancz had considerable talents as a publisher and called Gollancz 'A publishing genius'.¹⁶

The Victor Gollancz Publishing Company was to become one of the most successful publishing houses in Europe and using methods he had devised at Benn Brothers, Gollancz attracted in addition to Cronin, a string of well known authors including George Orwell, Henry Brailsford and Ford Madox Ford. In 1936, Stafford Cripps, the well known lawyer took Gollancz and the Marxist writer John Strachey out to lunch. Cripps wanted to know how to educate and revitalise the British left. He suggested a newspaper but Gollancz was keen on the idea of a book club which would sell radical books very cheaply.¹⁷ As a result of this meeting, Gollancz with Harold Laski and John Stachey founded the Left Book Club, whose aim was to help in the struggle for world peace, a better social and economic order and to resist the rise of fascism.¹⁸ The *modus operandi* was that they would choose a book every month to distribute to members for a monthly subscription of two shillings and six pence. This guaranteed a high circulation with, in addition, increased exposure and sales for the Gollancz company and the author. The Left Book Club was very successful with 40,000 members having joined by the time of the first rally in 1937.¹⁹ This encouraged Gollancz to become involved in the left-wing newspaper *Tribune* (founded in 1937) and the following year, he joined the board of directors which included Aneurin Bevan, who took over as editor in 1941.

When Cronin approached Gollancz in 1930 in regard to *Hatter's Castle*, he knew nothing of Gollancz's political views but only that his wife had chosen this publisher at random by sticking a pin in a list of publishers.²⁰ Although Cronin also approached other publishers, Gollancz responded first, agreed to assess the novel, became enthused by it and the societal issues it raised. Gollancz had already become an accomplished publisher and used his skills to actively and successfully

¹⁴ Ernest J. P. Benn, *Confessions of a Capitalist* (London: Hutchison, 1925).

¹⁵ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: A Biography* (London: Gollancz, 1987) p.157.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁷ Paul Laity, *Left Book Club Anthology*, ed. by Paul Laity (London: Gollancz, 2001).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

promote the novel. He was extremely effective at book sales but because of their strong personalities, he and Cronin frequently clashed and as early as in 1932 when, despite the considerable success of *Hatter's Castle*, Cronin engaged the services of the literary agent Augustus Dudley Peters (1892-1973). This caused additional strain to the relationship as Gollancz had an intense dislike of agents. In addition, they had a significant fallout over Cronin's second book *Three Loves* (1932) which Gollancz was critical of to Cronin's dismay. Even at this stage of his career, Cronin was confident in the quality of his writing and keen to obtain the best financial reward possible. Gollancz was a shrewd businessman, and if he did not feel a book was going to be a big seller, he would try to renegotiate the fee arrangement. He decided, however, because of the success of *Hatter's Castle* (1931), to publish the next two novels *Three Loves* (1932) and *Grand Canary* (1933) despite some poor literary reviews. This was the first sign of tension between two strong minded individuals.²¹ However, Gollancz was enthused by Cronin's fourth and fifth books *The Stars Look Down* (1935) and *The Citadel* (1937). As he was writing *The Citadel*, Cronin felt he was on a winner and made this clear to Gollancz:

I am enraptured by this book, working morning till night. Can't stop the thing, going swimmingly. Oh boy, this is going to be a whale of a book. Don't flinch when I tell you it's medical — it's the best you have ever read. And don't forget it has a thesis. There's a purpose close behind me and it's treading on my tale.²²

Cronin in an article two years previously, reflecting on his reasons for writing *The Stars Look Down* (1935), makes a general point about the driving force behind his writing:

Although the critics have been good enough to call me a 'born story teller', I have tried on many occasions to tell a story and have failed dismally. The truth is that unless I am conscious of a certain impulse behind the story, no book of mine could ever be written. It is a sense of communicative ardour in respect of one particular phase of life, or if I must be brutally frank, a thesis.²³

This provides an interesting insight into Cronin's motives behind being an author and

²¹ Ibid., p. 190.

²² Letter from A. J. Cronin to Victor Gollancz: Orion archives.1937.

²³ A. J. Cronin, 'The Stars Look Down', From an Unidentified Article, (1935). p. 99, Cronin File, Dumbarton Library. Despite exhaustive searches, I have as yet been unable to find the source of this article.

his rejection of being labelled a ‘born story teller’. Cronin’s thesis in regard to *The Citadel* becomes clearer in response to adverse comments especially from the medical profession and his rebuttal which indicated the key areas he wished to promote in the novel. This will be explored later in this chapter.

Cronin’s random choice of Gollancz was fortunate because of the latter’s strong socialist leanings and his identification with Cronin’s socially conscious novels. Gollancz was especially enthusiastic in promoting books with a message and he regarded *The Citadel* (1937) as coming into that category. He was already a supporter of public ownership and his strong left views led to fallouts with authors whose political views differed from his own. An example of this was his rejection of *Animal Farm* in April 1944 due to his concern about the political fallout in Russia.²⁴ Gollancz felt that positive newspaper reviews were key to successful sales and he therefore astutely appointed the book editor of *The Observer* to Gollancz Publishing. He also took out full-length reviews in the main newspapers, plastered the title on the side of buses and produced a distinctive yellow cover to the novels. However even Gollancz could not have predicted the impact and popularity of *The Citadel* not only in the UK, but also in Europe (including the Eastern Bloc) and the USA. For example, 150,000 copies were sold in the UK in the first three months after publication and 10,000 a week for the rest of that year. By November of 1937, 148,000 copies had been sold in the USA, a remarkable number given that the novel had only been released in July that year. A Gallup poll conducted in 1938 reported that *The Citadel* had impressed more people than any other book except the Bible.²⁵ Although there were a number of medical doctors in the twentieth century who become authors or who combined their medical career with writing novels, there were few around the time *The Citadel* was published.²⁶

Cronin used Gollancz throughout his career until the publication of *The Judas Tree* (1961). Their frequently strained relationship finally broke down. Cronin took exception to a fairly standard comment made by Gollancz who described this book as a ‘spellbinder’.²⁷ Cronin responded with

²⁴ Ruth Dudley Edwards, p. 387.

²⁵ A.M Gallup, *The Gallup poll Cumulative Index: Public Opinion, 1935-1997* (Lahman, M.D., Roman & Linfield, 2009), p. 135.

²⁶ The other UK book which was published in the same year was *Health and a Day* by Lord Horder of Ashford (1871-1955), one of the most distinguished physicians of his time. The book comprised a series of essays focussing on the unsatisfactory deal being given to GPs. However despite going through two editions in its first year, this book was eclipsed by *The Citadel*. It is interesting to note that Lord Horder was implacably opposed to the founding of the NHS.

²⁷ Correspondence between A.J.Cronin and Victor Gollancz, June 1961, In Alan Davies, *A. J. Cronin: The Man Who Created Dr Finlay* (Alma books, 2011), pp. 212-213.

great annoyance saying that ‘To describe it in such a way, when in fact it is a devastating and tragic study of a vain and irresponsible egoist, is the sort of insult one expects from the English critics, but not his publisher’.²⁸ He decided to end a relationship which had survived for thirty-one years despite many arguments mainly over matters of finance. Cronin returned to The Gollancz company for the publication of *The Minstrel Boy* in 1975 but by that time Gollancz had died.

3.3 Analysis of Synchronicity between the political predilections of Cronin and Gollancz

The left socialist views of Victor Gollancz were clear and unambiguous and that was the case throughout his life. He fought to promote these views through a number of channels including the Left Book Club, his long association with *Tribune* and his unapologetic approach to publishing political views in harmony with his own. The injustices in regard to health delivery raised by *The Citadel* would have appealed to him and he recognised the achievements brought by the founding of NHS.²⁹ Indeed he was in favour of nationalisation, supporting this development for the steel industry prior to the 1950 General Election.³⁰ Gollancz was committed to publishing books not only on politics but on other aspects of public interest such as war, unemployment and the under-privileged. He stated in 1933 to Edmond Fleg, ‘I am more and more specialising in long books published at very low prices, designed to convert people on a big scale to socialism and pacifism. My heart is above all in this work: and I want to continue with it, and increase it, as long as I possibly can.’³¹ These books were, however, not financially secure investments for the Company and Gollancz recognised this and hence his vigorous promotion of novels he felt would be financially successful.

The dominant themes in many of Cronin’s novels of economic hardship, the rights of workers and social status, was one that Gollancz would comfortably identify with. He would view this as the ideal scenario—a financially successful novel which also highlighted many of the ills affecting society. Cronin did not appear to have socialist leanings although he came from a Labour background. Immigrant Irish Catholic families formed a bedrock of support for the Labour party in Scotland right up until the early part of this century when they departed in considerable numbers for

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ruth Dudley Edwards, p. 511.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 512.

³¹ Sheila Hodges, p. 118.

the Scottish National Party.³² I will suggest in chapter four that Cronin's political views may have rested more towards the centre of the political spectrum with a leaning towards Distributism with its stated aim of more even division of wealth in society.

Although Cronin and Gollancz did not share the same political views, there was a synchronicity which arose from the thematic aspects of Cronin's novels and Gollancz's political views. There was also a synchronicity in their similar desires to make as much as possible out of financial opportunities. This, however, led to disagreements as they wrangled over the details of contracts, finance and the quality of Cronin's later novels. The relationship did however last for thirty-one years. Pragmatism on both sides led to the view that they were better together than apart³³ until the irretrievable breakdown in 1961.³⁴

3.4 Newspaper and Periodical Reviews

The novel was widely reviewed in the UK and overseas and the progressive increase in the number of reviews from Cronin's first novel until his fifth six years later is striking. In Dale Salwak's *A. J. Cronin: A Reference Guide*, there are five reviews of *Hatter's Castle* (1931) from the USA and ninety-three of *The Citadel* (1937), with reviews appearing in all major newspapers, the vast majority of which were favourable.³⁵ Examples of the comments regarding *The Citadel* are: 'This is a splendid novel, Cronin expresses his honest fears of a profession that caters to bogus healers who are infesting it. Cronin avoids hysteria in this wise indictment.'³⁶ 'A dramatic novel of great human interest. Dr A. J. Cronin reveals the illnesses of the medical profession.'³⁷ 'Important Book about the Medical Profession.'³⁸ A number of USA reviews drew comparisons with Sinclair Lewis' *Arrowsmith* (1925)³⁹ which details the travails of a doctor, who like Andrew Manson, begins his

³² T. M. Devine, 'The End of Disadvantage? The descendants of Irish Catholic immigrants in modern Scotland since 1945', ed. by Martin J. Mitchell. *The Irish in Scotland. New Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 2008), pp.191-207.

³³ Ruth Dudley Edwards, p.192.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 712.

³⁵ Dale Salwak, *A. J. Cronin: A Reference Guide* (G. K. Hall and Co, 1982).

³⁶ [Anon.], 'Not only the Doctors will read *The Citadel*', *Providence Journal* 11 September 1937, p. 7.

³⁷ [Anon.], 'Review of *The Citadel*', *Chattanooga Sunday Times*, 19 September, 1937, p. 21.

³⁸ [Anon.], 'Important Novel about The Medical Profession', *Boston Globe*, 25 September, 1937, p. 5.

³⁹ Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith* (Hardcourt, Brace and Co.1925).

career with a selfless fervour for both science and service. In both novels the hero becomes seduced by wealth and loses his principles, followed by redemption with a new start towards integrity.⁴⁰

A few reviews in the USA were less complimentary including the *New York Times Book Review* which commented that, like his earlier novels, Cronin had ‘first-hand ideas and second-hand skills’.⁴¹ The review goes on to say, ‘One is excited by his great moral earnestness but the end seems trivial. This triviality is due in large part to the author’s conception of character.’⁴² Its sister paper *The New York Times* describes it as a disappointment, after two months of such strong publicising by Gollancz.⁴³ These reviews were very much in the minority and this was confirmed by *The Citadel* being chosen by the American Booksellers Association as its favourite novel of 1937, a most prestigious award.⁴⁴

The British press provided a mixed picture. *The Manchester Guardian* stated: ‘This novel is more serious in its content than some of its predecessors and is written with a sense of responsibility’.⁴⁵ *The Scotsman* was unequivocal in its praise stating:

It is a thrilling tale full of dramatic situations and the characters both major and minor are drawn with a sure hand. And beneath its appeal as a good novel are its calls for high ideals in a very responsible profession and its criticism of methods which sometimes fall short of them.⁴⁶

Later that year, *The Scotsman* in its annual review of Scottish Books stated, ‘As far as popularity was concerned, Dr Cronin’s *The Citadel* was the outstanding novel by a Scottish writer.’ The review continues, ‘It does not profess to have much artistic merit but has the qualities which guarantee popularity — narrative, vigour, dramatic force in the creation of characters, and an undercurrent of revolt against stupidity and selfishness.’⁴⁷ The strongly socialist paper *Forward* stated, ‘The BMA

⁴⁰ [Anon.], ‘A Doctor’s Title towards Professional Integrity’, *The Miami Herald*, 3 October 1937, p. 13.

⁴¹ A. Kazin, ‘Dr Cronin’s Novel about the Medical Profession’, *New York Times Review*, 12 September 1937, p. 6.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ralph Thompson, ‘Book of the Times’, *New York Times*, 10 September 1937, p. 21.

⁴⁴ [Anon.], ‘Booksellers Give Prize to *The Citadel*: Cronin’s Work About Doctors’, *The New York Times*, 2 March 1938, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Harold Brighouse, ‘A Variety of Novels’, *Manchester Guardian*, 20 July, 1937, p. 7.

⁴⁶ [Anon.], ‘New Novels: A Doctor’s Ideals’, *The Scotsman*, 22 July 1937, p. 15.

⁴⁷ [Anon.], ‘Scottish Novels of 1937: Modern and Historical Themes’, *The Scotsman*, December 29, 1937, p. 15.

and private practitioners may not like it but the public should like it and read it as it is an exposure of evils that may pave the way for consideration of reorganisation of the medical service of the country along scientific lines.⁴⁸ Thus despite the relative absence of acknowledgement of Cronin as a Scottish writer noted in chapter one, here we see unequivocal praise from two Scottish newspapers. The *Times Literary Supplement* however opined that as a novel, Dr Cronin's book may be considered his best piece of work but as propaganda it is lopsided. It argued:

Cronin does not give enough prominence to county and municipal officers all over the country who care less for fees than healing, GPs who live devoted and anxious lives with only fourteen days away per year from the clamorous telephone by day and night and Harley Street doctors who could stand beside Lister without shame.⁴⁹

In this comparison, the paper is elevating some Harley Street doctors to the status of acknowledged greats of medicine and it sounds like this newspaper is aligning itself to the medical establishment. *The Times*⁵⁰ stated: 'what is not true is that a district called Harley Street is shark infested so that an honest man practises there at his peril.' This review goes on to say that 'While Dr Cronin would deny that he had denigrated Harley Street, many reading the novel would think otherwise and provide the excuse of this misunderstanding residing within its pages'. The *Sunday Express* ran a full page review with the headline 'A Doctor Attacks Harley Street'. In this article C. J. Lyon describes it as a novel by a very special author and goes on to say that when published the following day it is likely to cause a tremendous sensation because it is one of the most vigorous attacks on the medical profession ever written. Lyon emphasises the credentials of Dr Cronin as a highly qualified doctor. He phones Cronin and asks him if 'The novel was a work of imagination or did such conditions really exist?'. Cronin was clear in his response stating, 'It is not a fantasy. As a matter of fact, it represents things that happen every day. I wrote it as an attempt to contribute to a social problem.'⁵¹ The novel was subsequently serialised in the *Daily Express* and this review is in stark contrast to the negative reports in *The Times* and its *Literary Supplement*. The build up from *The Daily Express* may have been partly related to its decision to serialise *The Citadel* and to

⁴⁸ [Anon.], The Book Mark, 'Dr Cronin's Manson, MD', *Forward*, 7 August 1937, p. 8.

⁴⁹ [Anon.], 'Doctor's Dilemma' *The Times Literary Supplement*, 14 August 1937 p. 591.

⁵⁰ [Anon.], 'Descent into Harley Street: Dr Cronin's Novel', *The Times*, 27 July 1937, p. 19.

⁵¹ C. J. Lyon, 'A Doctor attacks Harley Street', *Sunday Express*, 18 July 1937, p.12.

counterbalance a highly critical review by the renowned literary critic James Agate who stated in the *Daily Express*:

Come come Dr Cronin ! Since your book is about disingenuousness in the noblest of professions, why permit yourself to be disingenuous? Why preface your novel with a note about every character, place and institution in your novel being entirely fictitious ? Characters, yes; places and institutions, no. Your attack on Harley Street is the most vigorous demolition of anything since Dickens...⁵²

Cronin vigorously defended his novel saying how his sympathy for struggling doctors evident in the three quarters of the book not dealing with Harley Street is ignored in the press account. He continues:

But I can say that everything in *The Citadel* is factual, the result of fifteen years spent inside the profession. And if you hold it to be 'nonsense,' I must disagree with you. I honestly believe our medical system to be as dead as a doornail, as the dodo, as the play Mr. Agate has French-quoted to its doom. But what am I up against? That inestimable British virtue ? inertia.⁵³

The reference to the play relates to the Agate's short-lived play *I Accuse* (1937) which opened and closed in the same month. Agate's review did nothing to affect the exceptional ongoing sales of *The Citadel*.

3.5 Medical Profession's Review and Cronin's Response

Considerable criticism came from the medical profession and Cronin was accused of bringing doctors into disrepute. The President of the BMA commented that 'If the charge made in this book is not a fantasy, it is mudslinging. It is best ignored as nothing can be done about it'.⁵⁴ In view of this, it is not surprising that the official journal of the BMA did not review the novel although one letter stated that the uncomplimentary remarks made about doctors in the book are probably deserved.⁵⁵ *The Lancet* review was critical on a number of fronts. They felt that no man in the

⁵² Books Abroad, *The Living Age*. September 1937, 81. [Reprints James Agate's review of *The Citadel*, 'Demolition on Harley Street,' in the *Daily Express* (London) and Cronin's reply in the same paper].

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ [Anon.], 'Review of *The Citadel*', *Lawrence (Mass) Tribune*, 27 August, 1937, p. 7.

⁵⁵ R. P. W. Shackleton, 'Insurance Practice', *British Medical Journal*, Supplement 1708, August 21 1937, 148.

position of Dr Manson, unless he were a rogue or a fool, would work with spurious consultants whose qualifications or lack of them he could easily ascertain. They also pointed out a number of initiatives that were already in place to address postgraduate education and that the standards achieved and maintained by doctors were no longer a matter of medical indifference.⁵⁶ It is possible that as Cronin's medical involvement ceased in 1930, he may have been out of date with some developments in postgraduate education and maintaining standards. The time delay between ending his clinical practice and writing *The Citadel* will be reflected on later in this section. One of the major medical journals in the USA stated that it was an unfair representation of medicine in either the UK or the USA and that Cronin had overemphasised the small amount of evil that everyone knows about.⁵⁷ It conceded that the novel made interesting reading but went on to predict that as a social document, it had failed its purpose and in this regard would make 'even less of an impression in the USA'.⁵⁸ However Dr Hugh Cabot from the Mayo Clinic congratulated Cronin on his novel and stated: 'This book is so important that I should be glad to believe that it should be at the disposal of every medical student and practitioner under the age of thirty-five in this country. It is a great book which may easily have a profound effect on the future of society.'⁵⁹

Cronin was taken aback by the response of the medical profession to his novel and discussed his motives when he spoke at *The Sunday Times* Book Fair at Lower Regent Street on the 9 December 1937 and his comments were recorded the following day in *The Times*.⁶⁰ He stated that some people had regarded the book as a piece of sensationalism and had charged him with throwing mud at Harley Street and generally behaving in an outrageous way. However, he then emphasised that he honestly believed that the medical profession was the finest in the world and a profession of self-sacrifice and humanity.⁶¹ He gave examples of heroism within the profession including fighting the plague, experimentally inoculating themselves and 'The obscure little panel doctor hurrying down mean streets with his lifeless bag of mercy'.⁶² He emphasised that his greatest respect for

⁵⁶ [Anon.], 'Reviews and Notices of Books', *The Lancet*, 230 (1937), 583-584.

⁵⁷ [Anon.], '*The Citadel*', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 109 (1937), 956-957.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Hugh Cabot, 'Doctor: England's New Dickens Reports on Former Profession', *Newsweek*, 13, September 1937, pp. 34-35.

⁶⁰ [Anon.], 'Finest Profession in the world: Dr A. J. Cronin on Doctors', *The Times*, 10 November 1937 p. 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

doctors did not prevent him from realising that the profession had become the victim of inertia and that curse of the profession was commercialism. He said further that: ‘If we as a race had an attribute, it was that we were rather impermeable to new ideas. It was that characteristic which had made the medical profession lag behind in this country a little and fail to accept the advances that had been made.’⁶³ Cronin further railed against ‘corruption, over charging and denuding people of money which they could ill-afford to waste’.⁶⁴ These were the issues he wished to fight to the last ditch in his novel.⁶⁵ Thus the thesis he had mentioned in his letter to Gollancz prior to publication was becoming clearer.⁶⁶ The following day, *The Manchester Guardian* reported comments made by Sir John Parsons, the President of the Royal Society of Medicine, at their annual dinner which clearly were a reaction to Cronin’s comments. He stated:

As medical men make their livelihood by disease, the more successful they are, the more impecunious they become. I would like to impress upon you that the vast majority of medical men are impecunious people. You may gather from current literature that medical men storm the citadel of wealth. But they are few and far between and those who do not come into that category, regard those who do as traitors and renegades to the Hippocratic Oath or on the other hand, have given up medicine and have taken up that form of literature which is quite rightly called fiction.⁶⁷

It is unclear whether the criticism of *The Citadel* from the medical establishment was also felt by front line workers within the health care systems. We do know that it became a highly encouraged text for young people considering a career in medicine in many parts of the world. It was recommended reading for medical students at the University of Glasgow in their module on medical ethics⁶⁸ and recently was analysed in detail by a group of medical students in Korea.⁶⁹ This study looked at whether as young doctors, they would give up ideals for prestige and wealth, all of

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ [Anon.], *The Times*, 10 November 1937 p. 11.

⁶⁶ Letter from A. J. Cronin to Victor Gollancz: Orion archives.1937.

⁶⁷ [Anon.], ‘Doctors and Wealth: Veiled Reply to Dr A. J. Cronin’, *The Manchester Guardian*, November 11, 1937, p. 19.

⁶⁸ K. C. Calman et al., ‘Literature and Medicine: A short course for Medical Students’, *Medical Education*, 22, (1988), 265-269.

⁶⁹ Se Won Hwang et al., ‘Analysis of Medical Student’s Book Reports on Cronin’s *The Citadel*,’ *Korean Journal of Medical Education*, 28, (2016), 231-235.

which were key considerations in *The Citadel*. Most stated that they would prefer to stick to their ideals but only thirty percent felt they would expose corruptions in medical practice. These findings may partly reflect cultural issues in that country but it does demonstrate the long term international medical interest in and the ongoing relevance of *The Citadel*. Calman points out that: ‘*The Citadel* with its references to specific issues, provided an impetus for change in the profession and how it was organised. In this respect it was an iconic book which changed public and professional thinking.’⁷⁰ The impression made by *The Citadel* endures with a recent article in the *British Medical Journal* citing Andrew Manson as one of the fictional doctors who inspire,⁷¹ and with an introduction to the most recent edition of *The Citadel*⁷² by Dr Adam Kay, a young doctor, whose own book has been a UK best seller for the past two years.⁷³

It is worth reflecting further on the gap between Cronin’s time in medical practice and the publication of *The Citadel*. The novel covered a period of nine years until Cronin left the medical profession and it was a further seven years before it was published. It is possible that Cronin felt that the time lag between seeing his last patient and writing the novel made him more comfortable to be uninhibited in his criticisms. It would seem however that he did not set out to be controversial and antagonistic to his former colleagues but he did assert that he had a thesis which related to corrupt practice, non-existent post-graduate training and a lack of evidence based medicine. In addition, despite being upset by his colleagues’ reactions and some aspects of the media response, he made no apology and stood by the assertions made in the novel.⁷⁴ Cronin and Gollancz would have been aware that the controversy surrounding the novel was a positive feature in terms of sales and this proved to be the case. Gollancz’s provocative decision to send two hundred copies to the BMA annual meeting produced the desired hostile response.⁷⁵ In suggesting that the novel should be ignored, the BMA inadvertently fanned the flames of its popularity and importance, including a call for a UK Government enquiry.⁷⁶ Aneurin Bevan was also the recipient of hostility from the

⁷⁰ Kenneth Calman, ‘*The Citadel* by A. J. Cronin’ in *The Bottle Imp*, Issue 15, ed. by Gwen Enstam, Duncan Jones (Association for Scottish Literary Studies, November 2014).

⁷¹ Abi Rimmer, ‘The Gift of Inspiration: Fictional Heroes’, *British Medical Journal*, 371, (2020), 486-487.

⁷² A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel* (London: Picador, 2019).

⁷³ Adam Kay, *This Is Going to Hurt: Secret Diaries of a Junior Doctor* (London: Picador, 2017).

⁷⁴ [Anon.], ‘Finest Profession in the World’, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Dale Salwak, p. 64.

⁷⁶ [Anon.], ‘Cronin’s New Novel’, *New Chronicle* (London), 15 September 1937, p. 7.

medical establishment when he proposed the concept of a National Health Service. I will return to this in detail in chapter five.

Alan Riach writes: ‘Cronin’s popularity might also arise from the formula of his narrative structure(s): a solitary-hero figure is engaged under pressure and in conditions of critical isolation, to address a situation of social hypocrisy and to redress the wrongs of an establishment’s moral self-righteousness. It’s a David versus Goliath scenario designed to be popular (especially if David wins). This scenario itself contributes to the perhaps mythical sense that *The Citadel* and Cronin himself were to some degree responsible for the founding of the NHS. That is ‘we might like to think so, despite there being no way to prove it conclusively.’⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Alan Riach, *Scottish Literature: an Introduction* (Edinburgh: Luath Press 2022), pp. 349-350. (In Press).

Chapter 4:

Subsequent Medical Writings, Film Versions and TV Productions of *The Citadel* and The Influence of Cronin's Personal and Political Views on his Writing

4.1 Subsequent Medical writings

Cronin wrote twenty-five novels and this section will address seven of his works thematically. The first four are predominantly medically related and while the subsequent three have different storylines they also shed light on Cronin's life and address issues similar to *The Citadel*. In particular, they highlight issues of desertion of principles followed by redemption and the narrator's antipathy for bureaucracy and inertia in the face of the need to change. This inertia is exemplified in the medical establishment, religious organisations and in centrally controlled government agencies.

Country Doctor (1935) the source of the much later TV series *Dr Finlay's Casebook* and comprised short stories about a young GP practising in the fictional village of Tannochbrae in the Highlands of Scotland.¹ The main character is Dr Finlay Hyslop, later changed to Dr Alan Finlay. Three other characters are key in this novella—Dr Cameron, Hyslop's crusty old but highly experienced partner, Janet the house keeper and Dr Snoddy the ineffective public health doctor. Some of the scenarios are repeated in *Adventures in Two Worlds*. In fact, the case of myxoedema madness appears in both works as well as in *The Citadel*. On each occasion, the incompetence of the public health doctor keen to certify the patient as psychotic is emphasised. Cronin's poor opinion of public health doctors is apparent in a number of his novels and reflects his distrust of those in public positions and in centrally-run organisations and has relevance when Cronin's views about nationalisation of health are examined. *Country Doctor* is a mere sixty-eight pages in length, although Cronin subsequently published a further series of short stories *The Adventures with a Black Bag* (1942) and compilations of these short stories and others were published under the titles of *Dr Finlay of Tannochbrae* (1978) and *Dr Finlay's Casebook* (2010).

The Green Years (1944) traces Robert Shannon's life from the age of seven until he commences his medical studies at The University of Glasgow.² He arrives in Scotland from Ireland

¹ A. J. Cronin, 'Country Doctor', *Hearst International Cosmopolitan Magazine*, May 1935.

² A. J. Cronin, *The Green Years*.

after the death of both parents from tuberculosis. His mother, a Scottish Presbyterian, had married an Irish Catholic to the distinct disapproval of her family and it is into this environment that Robert enters. It is a dysfunctional home with both grandparents and two unrelated great-grandparents living under the same roof. The most engaging character is his great-grandfather (Dandie) who has an eye for young ladies, a taste for alcohol and a mischievous approach to life. He becomes the only ally to Robert who, like, Cronin has many hurdles to clear, as a Catholic boy living with Presbyterian relatives. The narrator relates with considerable humour Robert's First Holy Communion where Dandie, the only relative in attendance, over imbibes and makes approaches to a young lady attendee. The issue of Robert at the age of seven refusing to eat meat on a Friday is likely to have origins in Cronin's early life experiences, living with Presbyterian relatives. The success of this novel is summed up by David Apel³ who states that it showed a great storyteller at the peak of his powers, emphasising the strength of Cronin's narrative skills, which were sustained over several decades.

Shannon's Way (1948) picks up the story following Shannon's graduation from medical school.⁴ The main thrust of this novel is the central protagonist's desire to become a researcher and the challenges he faces despite little support from the medical establishment. This novel, like *The Citadel*, depicts the variable care of patients and absence of medical standards. In addition, the religious element is again evident in regard to the central character's marriage to a woman of a different faith.⁵ The research theme may seem an unusual aspect although Cronin mentions in *The Citadel* Andrew Manson's desire to have taken up a more prestigious position at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary before going to South Wales.⁶ However his financial situation and the need to pay back a loan necessitated choosing the latter. It may be that a similar situation pertained to Cronin, as he was a brilliant student, would have flourished in a research environment and did undertake research involving lung disease in miners for a year while in England. It may well be that without his impoverished situation, his professional life would have taken a different direction and the opportunity to become a writer would not have occurred.

³ David Apel, 'Turning a New Leaf', *Chicago News*, 15 November 1948, p. 39.

⁴ A. J. Cronin, *Shannon's Way* (Gollancz, 1948).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁶ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 21.

Adventures in Two Worlds (1952) was advertised as an autobiography, mirroring many aspects of *The Citadel* and providing insight into Cronin's views on health care.⁷ Puzzlingly, Cronin stated in a letter to Victor Gollancz: 'This will not be an autobiography, but will be full of incident, tender, moving and dramatic with just that flavour that the readers love, a really warm and interesting book.'⁸ Despite this statement, there are many details in this book which point to autobiographical aspects of Cronin's life up until the early 1930s. The narrator uses the first person singular throughout and the details regarding his time at Glasgow University and later are accurately portrayed. These include his medical duties in the west of Scotland, his time in South Wales as an Inspector of Mines and finally in Private Practice in London.

The book covers three periods of the narrator's life: his time as a medical student and doctor in Scotland, as a doctor in Wales and England, and his early days as an author. In the first section, the narrator discusses his brief time as a GP in Scotland where the seeds of the highly successful BBC series *Dr Finlay's Casebook* were sown. He refers to his relationship with his senior partner Dr Cameron who may have been based on a Dr George Imrie, who was a renowned Burns speaker and who died suddenly in 1928 at a Burns supper in Garelochhead.⁹ In the novel, Dr Cameron dies after contracting pneumonia following an evening home visit in poor weather and at this point, the principal character reveals his desire to marry his girlfriend and feels that a move away from the West of Scotland would be best given their different religious backgrounds.¹⁰ Cronin's reference to such a situation in many of his books underscores the effect it had on him throughout his life.

The second section of *Adventures in Two Worlds* focuses on his time as a doctor in South Wales and England. Many of the named places mentioned in *The Citadel* are changed to the actual names or a variation. For the only time in any of his novels, Cronin mentions Aneurin Bevan.¹¹ which is of key importance and will be discussed in chapter five. The final section addresses his move back to Scotland and the challenges he faces in writing *Hatter's Castle* and then, as discussed in chapter one, enters the realms of his views on religion, good living and his previous struggles with his faith.

⁷ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*.

⁸ Correspondence between A. J. Cronin and V. Gollancz, Orion Archives. (1950): in Alan Davies, *A. J. Cronin: The Man who Created Dr Finlay* (Alma Books 2011), p. 75.

⁹ [Anon], 'James Imrie: Obituary', *Lennox Herald*, 1928.

¹⁰ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, p. 116.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

The Stars Look Down (1935), like *The Citadel*, has a strong mining theme in addition to medical themes which provide insight into Cronin's views on health care.¹² The wife of the mine owner is a chronic invalid and the various remedies used were without an evidence base, or diagnosis having been made:

She had exhausted the doctors of Sleesdale: she had seen half the specialists in Tynecastle: she had turned in despair to a nature healer, homeopathist, a herbalist and an electrical physicist, who swathed her in magnetic belts. Each of the quacks had started by being wonderful. 'The man at last,' the mine owner's wife would say and each had sadly proved himself a fool.¹³

The narrator invites us to consider the possibility that the character is a malingerer and then expresses concern that such situations would be common within a state run service.¹⁴ The other medical incident of note involves a doctor who pays a visit to deliver a baby. The author acknowledges that, in spite of the doctor's unusual habits (poor untidy dress code and lack of aseptic technique), he was thoroughly competent. The narrator is alluding here to the fact that doctors who are not dressed for the part may still be competent in their profession. This contrasts with his description in *The Citadel* of the immaculate dress worn by incompetent private practitioners in London.

The title of *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1941) was chosen by Cronin for inscription on his tombstone presumably because of the importance of religion in his life and the issues raised in this novel.¹⁵ Cronin wrote to a book reviewer after the first draft stating: 'While simple and very moving, I think it is by far the most important thing I have ever seen and deeply significant today.'¹⁶ The novel reflects the iniquity of religious intolerance which Cronin and his mother were victims of and which Cronin wanted to expose. He appeared to identify with the hero of this novel, a downtrodden, humble, yet forward thinking Catholic missionary priest. As with many of Cronin's novels, there is the contrast between the humility and hardship of the hero and the austere, pompous, self indulgent, controlling character who in this novel is his old school friend and who

¹² A. J. Cronin, *The Stars Look Down* (Gollancz, 1935).

¹³ *Ibid.*, Twenty-second impression (Gollancz, 1977, p. 31).

¹⁴ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, p. 373.

¹⁵ A. J. Cronin, *The Keys of The Kingdom* (Gollancz, 1941).

¹⁶ Christopher Morley, 'The Keys of the Kingdom', *Book of the Month Club News* (July 1941). p. 3.

risers to the rank of Bishop. Religious intolerance and the importance of the narrator's Christian faith were major drivers in this novel and hence the hero was less concerned about converting souls, preferring to display tolerance and love for all irrespective of religion.¹⁷ The Bishop tells the principal character on visiting the mission:

I am sadly disappointed in your conduct at the mission. Take your convert rate. It doesn't compare with the other statistics. We run them as a graph at headquarters and you're the lowest in the whole chart.¹⁸

Father Chisholm responds with unusual irony: 'I suppose missionaries differ in their individual capabilities.' and then describes priests of the Chinese religion as 'good and noble men'.¹⁹ This tolerance and ecumenical approach is emphasised in the obituary of his father by Vincent Cronin.²⁰

Although this novel does not specifically address medical issues, there are some parallels to be drawn with the deficiencies in health care delivery addressed in *The Citadel*. Thus in *The Keys of the Kingdom* we see the narrator emphasising the importance of a Christian approach to life rather than one of dogma and over reverence for the bureaucracy of the Church. In a similar way in *The Citadel*, the narrator views bureaucracy and the dogmatic approach of many doctors as damaging to the delivery of health care. The adverse reaction to *The Keys of the Kingdom* among the clergy of the Catholic Church was similar to that of the medical profession to *The Citadel*. Cronin's biographer Alan Davies quotes three sources of criticism by senior Catholic clerics in regard to Cronin's views on Catholic Doctrine and in his portrayal of the Catholic Church.²¹ Cronin responded robustly to these criticisms emphasising that he had a purpose to his novel. In *The Keys of the Kingdom*, it was to promote tolerance of all faiths and compassion for humankind, thus reducing for others the chances of the unhappiness Cronin experienced in childhood as a consequence of religious intolerance.²²

¹⁷ A. J. Cronin, *The Cronin Omnibus: The Keys of the Kingdom* (Gollancz, 1994), p. 923.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 924.

²⁰ Vincent Cronin, pp. 175-176.

²¹ Alan Davies, pp. 160-162.

²² A. J. Cronin, 'The Keys of the Kingdom', *Life Magazine*, October 1941: As quoted in Alan Davies, p.163.

The Minstrel Boy (1975) was Cronin's last novel and has a number of autobiographical features.²³ The description in particular of his time at St Aloysius' College (St Ignatius' College in the novel) relates closely to archive information at the School such as Cronin captaining the school first eleven to the final of the Scottish Schools football Cup.²⁴ The principal theme relates to the life of one of his co-pupils (Desmonde), who becomes a priest and leaves the church after an affair. Desmonde has always had a wonderful singing voice and then pursues a successful Hollywood career before giving it all up to work among the poor in India.²⁵ In this novel, the narrator's father waits for him for Stonyhurst Jesuit school but then dies from TB (as with Cronin's father) when Cronin is seven. The narrator chooses medicine and as a young doctor his friend Desmonde says to him, 'You might suddenly chuck medicine and become an author.'²⁶ Although there is little additional information in this novel about Cronin's views on health care, once again we see an emerging theme of betrayal of principles followed by redemption.

4.2 Cinematic, Television and Radio Representations of *The Citadel*

The success of *The Citadel* led rapidly to consideration of its suitability and potential success as a film. Cronin was convinced that the novel would transfer successfully into celluloid and became heavily involved in the literary presentation and the choice of the lead roles.²⁷ Cronin sold the rights of the film to his friend Victor Saville on the understanding that Cronin would have a significant say in the production.²⁸ Cronin in an interview with *Film Weekly* stated that he and Saville had set themselves the task of 'capturing the authentic social atmosphere of England and were going to build up the drama from the genuine source'.²⁹ He also insisted on the mining scenes being shot in South Wales rather than in London. He further declared that:

²³ A. J. Cronin, *The Minstrel Boy* (Gollancz, 1975) .

²⁴ St Aloysius' College Archives.

²⁵ In this novel the narrator is named Alec Shannon and when asked about his Christian names he replies. 'I have a perfectly horrible name. I was called Alexander, as a vain propitiation, quite useless to my grandfather and Joseph in honour of the saint.' In point of fact, Cronin shared his forename Archie with his Presbyterian maternal grandfather.

²⁶ A. J. Cronin, *The Minstrel Boy*, p.65.

²⁷ J. D. Williams: 'A.J.Cronin discusses My Plans for *The Citadel*', *Film Weekly*, 1938, XX, 485, p.12.

²⁸ Sally Dux, 'The *Citadel* (1938): Doctors, Censors and the Cinema,' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 32 (2012), 1-17.

²⁹ J. D. Williams, 'A. J. Cronin discusses My Plans for *The Citadel*', p. 12.

Almost every class of person would come into the picture and the film would show the evils of the present system, how wealth accumulates in the pockets of a few, while miners bring up families on thirty-seven shillings and six pence per week.³⁰

Cronin also expressed the view that Robert Donat was the ideal candidate for the role of Andrew Manson by stating that: ‘He was one of the few actors who could make this a very penetrating picture.’³¹ Cronin had by this time a detailed knowledge of how the cinema portrayed novels with a social message. Cronin also wanted to reduce the emphasis on some of the more poignant aspects of the novel including the death of Manson’s wife and therefore in the film version, Manson’s friend Denny dies and not his wife. King Vidor was persuaded to take on direction of the film after the *Film Weekly* article had been sent to him by Saville.³² Like Victor Gollancz, Vidor was impressed by novels which highlighted social issues and was quoted as saying: ‘I have always liked working on stories which have dealt with the ordinary man — his reaction to circumstances, his behaviour when poverty, war or unemployment come to him.’³³

The film had to pass the British Board of Film Censors and this was not as straightforward as might have been expected. The censors were unhappy about criticisms of revered establishments such as the medical profession, which was included in the code of guidance to censors as exempt from criticism.³⁴ The rules which governed the certification of movies stated :

Incidents which bring into contempt public characters acting in their capacity as such i.e. officers and men wearing her majesty’s uniform, Ministers of Religion, Ministers of the Crown, Ambassadors and Representatives of Foreign Nations, Administrators of the Law and Medical Men.³⁵

In addition the cinema was the mass medium, regularly patronised by the ‘working classes’ and the potential of films influencing or even inflaming this huge audience was a concern to the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

³¹ Ibid., p. 6.

³² Sally Dux, ‘The Citadel (1938). p. 5.

³³ Film Weekly, 26 May 1938, p.34; in Sally Dux, ‘*The Citadel* (1938): Doctors, Censors and the Cinema’.

³⁴ Ivor Montague, ‘The Political Censorship of Films’ (Pamphlet, London: Gollancz, 1929) p. 31.

³⁵ Ibid.

establishment.³⁶ Several medical films had already been banned in the 1930s. For example, the censors described the film *The Doctor's Dilemma* (based on the play by George Bernard Shaw) as detrimental to the honour of doctors and the medical profession in general.³⁷ This would not have come as a surprise to Shaw given his well known quote: 'In this regard, we have not lost faith, but we have transferred it from God to the medical profession.'³⁸ The *Citadel* was no exception to rigorous assessment which provided varying views among the censors. One stated:

There is so much that is disparaging to doctors in this book, that I consider it unsuitable for production as a film. I think it is dangerous to shatter what faith the general public has in the medical profession and, in any case, if the story is considered at all, the approval of the Medical Council should be obtained. Incidents showing doctor's petty jealousies, drunken doctors, incompetent doctors, a doctor refusing to answer the call of a poor boy, an untrained doctor's wife acting as dispenser; as well as scenes of operations, are in my opinion prohibitive. I think a scenario should be submitted if a film is to be made of this.³⁹

Despite this apparently damning indictment, the film was approved with watering down of the criticisms of the medical profession, editing of some of the more gruesome scenes and the insistence on the following written prologue at the start of the film which read:

This motion picture is a story of individual characterisations and is in no way intended as a reflection on the great medical profession which has done so much towards beating back those forces of nature which retard the physical progress of the human race.⁴⁰

³⁶ Jeffrey Richards, 'The British Board of Film Censors and Content Control in the 1930s: images of Britain.' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1, 2 (1981), 95-116.

³⁷ British Board of Film Censors, Scenario Reports, *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1935/36) (Special Collections, BFI, London).

³⁸ Schlesinger stated. 'From a vantage point 100 years after Shaw's pronouncement, the authority of the medical profession in the United States can be depicted as a grand historical arc, rising to great heights by mid-twentieth century but faltering badly as the century drew to a close.' (Mark Schlesinger, 'A Loss of Faith: The Sources of Reduced Political Legitimacy for the American Medical Profession', *The Milbank Quarterly*, 80, 2, 2002, 185-235). Comment: In my view, this has also been very much the case in the UK.

³⁹ BBFC Scenario Reports, '*The Citadel*' (1937/91) Special Collections, BFI, London in Sally Dux, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Written Prologue to the Film, *The Citadel*, directed by King Vidor (1938).

In addition to these pre-requisites, the film was awarded an ‘A’ certificate, thus restricting viewing to adult audiences.⁴¹ and was released in the USA in November 1938, and in the UK one month later. It was, like the novel, an outstanding success with almost uniformly positive reviews in both countries. *The New York Times* called it:

A splendid transcription of a dramatic story, with strong performances to match a sensitive director's design. The result is a passionate affirmation of faith in the good physician, a passionate denunciation of the hypocritical, an appeal for broader medical service, and a lesson in humility.⁴²

The New York Daily News stated, ‘Deeply moving...worth seeing...splendidly realised by Vidor’s forceful direction and the excellence of Robert Donat’s performance...a superb film’⁴³ and ‘This is the best film that has yet to be made in Britain.’⁴⁴ One review suggested that the film was left with ‘a confused political direction — at some moments it amounts to a plea for a National Health Service, at others simply for a new set of ideals for the medical profession’.⁴⁵ This may have been in part due to the changes insisted on by the censor. *The Citadel* was voted by the National Board of Review, USA as the best English language film of 1938.⁴⁶ It received four Oscar nominations and gained the best box office sales in Britain in 1939. This film undoubtedly increased knowledge and public awareness in regard to the novel despite the criticism of the medical profession being watered down. The film was re-released after World War Two in October 1946, thus rekindling the public interest in the deficiencies in health care delivery. In addition the re-release occurred at a time when the political establishment was grappling with the concept of a National Health Service and was accompanied by several new advertising catchlines. An example was, ‘The good a doctor can do—and the harm!: MGM's fearless exposure of the unhealthy elements of the medical profession.’ It has been suggested that the film would win over public support for a National Health

⁴¹ BBFC website (<http://www.bbfc.co.uk/AFF051454>).

⁴² [Anon.], ‘Review of *The Citadel*’, *New York Times*, 4 November 1938, p. 27.

⁴³ [Anon.], ‘Review of *The Citadel*’, *New York Daily News*, as quoted in *The Cinema*, 12 December 1938, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Paul Holt, ‘Review of *The Citadel*’, *Daily Express* 22 December, 1938. p.1.

⁴⁵ Michael Shortland, ‘Medicine and Film: a Checklist, Survey and Research Source’ (Oxford, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1989), p. 8.

⁴⁶ Tenth National Board of Review Awards, *The Citadel*, Best American Film, December 15 1938.

scheme and encouragement for Aneurin Bevan's health changes.⁴⁷ However, there is no evidence that the re-release of the film was politically driven although it does seem an interesting coincidence. The film continues to be watched in the twenty-first century and the National Board of Review USA reports many positive reviews which emphasise the superb cast, the excellent story line and the much needed exposure of defects in the British Health System in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ As recently as February 2020, the film was shown at a festival to retrospectively honour King Vidor who received a posthumous award for the outstanding nature of his films including *The Citadel* over a span of sixty-seven years.⁴⁹ The impact of the film on the medical profession is underscored by being voted third in the list of medical films which were most important in the education of medical students.⁵⁰

Grand Canary was the only one of Cronin's first four novels which was made into a film (1934), prior to *The Citadel*. This movie was not considered a success even by Cronin.⁵¹ However, the popularity of *The Citadel* led Hollywood to review Cronin's other previous novels for adaptation to the silver screen. *The Stars Look down* (1940) and *Hatter's Castle* (1942) became notable successes with strong thematic similarities to *The Citadel* and having a particular appeal to the general public during the war years. These movies presented stories of heroic downtrodden wronged characters facing the oppressor and succeeding against the odds which many UK citizens associated with the challenges presented by World War Two. Each novel contained dominant intimidating characters as well as admirable individuals who were determined to succeed and to right the wrongs of society. They were also interwoven with personal tragedies and romance. *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1944) was also very successful as a film, with similar themes but on this occasion dominated by religion. Subsequently there was a steady stream of film and TV adaptations of Cronin's novels in different countries and different languages including Spanish, Italian, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese and Indian.⁵²

⁴⁷ Sally Dux, 15.

⁴⁸ User reviews, National Board of Review, USA, nationalboardofreview.org [accessed 26 June 2020].

⁴⁹ Berlinale 2020, 'Retrospective King Vidor, Berlinale', 28 February 2020. https://www.berlinale.de/en/press/press-releases/detail_8008.html.

⁵⁰ Roger Dobson, 'Can medical students learn empathy at the movies?' *British Medical Journal*, 329 11 December 2004, 1363.

⁵¹ J. Danvers Williams, 'A. J. Cronin discusses My Plans for *The Citadel*', *Film Weekly*, 29 January 1938, 6.

⁵² Alberto Enrique D'Ottavio Cattani. 'Archibald Joseph Cronin: A Writing-Doctor between Literature and Film', *Journal of Medicine and Movies*, 5 (2009), 59-65.

In 1982, the BBC commissioned a ten part serialisation of *The Citadel*, the year after Cronin died, with Ben Cross in the starring role as Andrew Manson.⁵³ Ben Cross⁵⁴ at that time was a much sought after actor following the success of *Chariots of Fire* (1981). This series was also shown on Masterpiece Theatre on the Public Television Station in the USA, hosted by Alistair Cooke and was well received. *The New York Times* stated, ‘The series holds up remarkably well as a story and drama.’⁵⁵ This production followed the novel more authentically than the film and gave a much less sanitised presentation of the novel, covering a number of aspects which were absent in the original film. This latter aspect may have been due to both the less strict censoring in 1982 and the longer running time of the TV version.

It would be fair to say that, like *The Citadel* twenty-five years before, the BBC series *Dr Finlay’s Casebook* (1962-1971) was a spectacular success as a consequence of perfect casting, an appealing medical drama and a medical related series which were especially popular at that time.⁵⁶ There was considerable discussion between the BBC and Cronin regarding the appeal of these short stories. Eventually and fortunately when a gap appeared in the schedule, it was decided to run a trial of three episodes. Cronin wrote just the first two series and tried to cancel the programme thereafter saying that it was turning into a soap opera.⁵⁷ There was a public outcry and Cronin was bombarded by letters pleading with him to relent, which he did, claiming that he had been misrepresented.⁵⁸ The programme ran for nine years and was also hugely popular in many other countries. The appeal of the stories had similarities to the themes in many of Cronin’s novels. Stewart Lane writing in the *Daily Worker* stated: ‘These stories go beyond the theme of a young idealistic doctor’s struggles against bureaucracy and superstition, to reflect much of the low living standards and the vicious exploitation of the past.’⁵⁹ This plight of the underprivileged is a thread going through Cronin’s novels as was his distrust of centrally run organisations. Cronin’s ability to draw attention to the

⁵³ *The Citadel*, BBC television series, (1982).

⁵⁴ I corresponded with Ben Cross in regard to his role as Andrew Manson but sadly he died prior to being able to answer my questions.

⁵⁵ John J. O’Connor, ‘Citadel from Britain’, *New York Times*, 18 November 1983, p. 35.

⁵⁶ *Dr Finlay’s Casebook*.

⁵⁷ Letter from A. J. Cronin to Andrew Osborn, BBC written archives, 30 March 1964.

⁵⁸ Letter from A. J. Cronin to Cyrus Brooks, BBC written archives, 21 May 1964.

⁵⁹ Stuart Lane, ‘Review of *Dr Finlay’s Casebook*’, *Daily Worker*, 1963, in Pater Haining, *On Call with Dr. Finlay* (Boxtree Ltd, 1994), p.27.

need for accountability within the medical profession was reinforced to the public through the popularity of *Dr Finlay's Casebook*.

Around the time of the introduction to television of *Dr Finlay's Casebook* in 1962, there was a number of other dramas regarding medical issues. These included from the UK, *Emergency Ward 10* (1957-1967) and *The Doctors* (1967-1969) and from the USA, *Dr Kildare* (1961-1966) and *Ben Casey* (1961-1966). There has been a constant stream of medically related programmes, since then, both educational and for entertainment. A recent *British Medical Journal* edition focussed on some of these programmes including *MASH*, *Dr Kildare*, *House* and *The Citadel*.⁶⁰ Eminent doctors were asked to name their favourite and how it influenced their practice. Professor Mala Rao who chose *The Citadel* stated:

His story inspired me to become a doctor, a public health specialist, and a passionate advocate for universal access to healthcare globally and to challenge prejudice such as racism in medicine.⁶¹

Radio was also a popular broadcast medium for *The Citadel* and there have been recurrent series produced by the BBC up until and including 2020. This most recent adaptation bore little resemblance to the novel and did not receive a favourable review.⁶² This could well have been because of its radical departure from the novel.

4.3 Influence of Cronin's Personal Life and Political Views on his Writings

Cronin's challenging upbringing clearly made him determined to succeed in medicine. He writes in *Adventures in Two Worlds*:

The thought galvanised me: I could not, must not fail; at all costs I must succeed. That indeed was my dominant passion, the leitmotif of my life, the very reason of my being, implanted in my breast by those ten years of unbelievable hardship which had followed upon the death of my father — an event which had transformed my easy, affluent and pampered existence to a struggle for bare survival. Nothing can exceed the longing of a poor

⁶⁰ Abi Rimmer, 'The Gift of Inspiration: Fictional Heroes', *British Medical Journal*, 371 (2020), 486-487.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Gillian Reynolds, 'The Citadel' *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 10 May 2020, p. 17.

youth beaten down by circumstances to rise above misfortune and justify himself not only in his own eyes but also in the eyes of others.⁶³

Here Cronin displays a steely determination fuelled by his challenging upbringing. His entry to medicine was achieved through the award of a scholarship and this secured his emergence from a poor and at times troubled and financially challenging upbringing to that of the middle class. He never allowed himself to forget his impoverished background and the theme of a person from a deprived and economically poor family who becomes successful professionally and raises his social status is a recurrent one in his novels. This fits in well with the lone hero story which is very much in evidence in *The Citadel*. The effect of his background may have partly explained Cronin's desire to be protective of his money, even though he would spend lavishly on art treasures and other personal items.⁶⁴ Many of his principal characters also became enthralled and seduced by wealth and all its trappings. This forms a counterpoint with his desire to improve the life of the disadvantaged and the quality of health care for the working class. Cronin cared deeply for his former profession and for his Catholic faith, as exemplified by the main characters in *The Citadel* and *The Keys of the Kingdom*. There is clearly a sense of admiration for Fr. Chisholm in *The Keys of the Kingdom* and that novel displays Cronin's knowledge of Catholic doctrine. The comparisons between Andrew Manson and Francis Chisholm are striking in that they are both anti-establishment, with Manson seeing the flaws in health care and Chisholm railing against intolerance and the pomp of the Church. Both would be regarded as of a socialist persuasion as indeed would a number of the principal characters in Cronin's novels.

It is difficult to find a modern-day niche for Cronin's politics. His political leanings would have been influenced by his upbringing, his religion and the way in which his life was to develop. As displayed in many of his novels, Cronin was very conscious of the plight of the poor and the disadvantaged and railed against exploitation of the miners by greedy owners and recognised a need for change. David Fenwick argues forcefully for nationalisation of the mines in *The Stars Look Down* (1935) and this strengthens his successful bid for election to Parliament.⁶⁵ However others argued strongly for 'keeping industry safe from nationalisation', and described it as bolshevism gone mad.⁶⁶ The owners of the mines were very much against nationalisation and favoured more of

⁶³ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ Letter from A. J. Cronin to John Bush (Orion archives, 8 August, 1977).

⁶⁵ A..J. Cronin, *The Stars Look Down*, p. 427.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.1262.

a capitalist agenda. Cronin was not in favour of nationalisation,⁶⁷ and specifically was not in favour of nationalisation of health, feeling strongly that systems which were free at the point of delivery would be abused.⁶⁸ This theme will be developed further in chapter five. He was protective of the considerable wealth he had accrued and was comfortable mixing with the elite and in many of his novels speaks of the finer aspects of life such as top class restaurants, opera at prestigious venues, expensive paintings and friendships with high profile individuals.⁶⁹ However, he could not be regarded as a capitalist, seeing the need to support the working class in the face of unscrupulous and demanding owners.⁷⁰ Cronin's oldest son Vincent felt his father had liberal tendencies and his youngest son Andrew felt that if his father had been allowed to vote in the USA, he would have voted Democrat.⁷¹ Cronin's Catholic beliefs provided him with a conscience in regard to his wealth and those less well off in society and with a sense of obligation to think of those less fortunate in society.⁷² He therefore fits in some respects into what was known in the 1930s as Distributism, a party very much in tune with Catholic teaching. The Distributist party had as its first chairman in 1933

G. K. Chesterton, who converted to Catholicism in 1922, joining his friend Hilaire Belloc in that faith. They both strongly supported the concept of the encouragement of individual ownership in the means of livelihood, the dispersement of large aggregates of industrial capital and the fundamental unit of society being the family. These views are reflected in the Papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and are based on the principle of subsidiarity from which Distributism is derived.⁷³ The Catholic Church expressed this by stating that a community of a higher order should not interfere with a community of a lower order depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support in case of need and help co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society always with a view to the common good, a concept reaffirmed in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991).⁷⁴ Cronin was committed to his family and admired the family orientated

⁶⁷ A. J. Cronin, 'Socialised Medicine', p. 1360.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ A. J. Cronin, *The Judas Tree*, 6th impression (Gollancz, 1976).

⁷⁰ A. J. Cronin, *The Stars Look down*.

⁷¹ Alan Davies, p. 123.

⁷² A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*.

⁷³ 'Quadragesimo Anno', *Encyclical by Pope Pius XI* (1931).

⁷⁴ 'Centesimus Annus', *Encyclical of Pope John Paul II* (1991).

approach of the Medical Aid Societies in South Wales. He supported his sons by providing them with private education and emphasised in his Last Will and Testament that he had done everything possible for them and hoped they would appreciate that.⁷⁵ Cronin's commitment to the family unit, his religious beliefs and his commitment to protection rather than exploitation of the poorer off in society all point towards Distributism. However the evidence for this is circumstantial. This could form the basis for a future research project.

Cronin's novels and the films of his novels were remarkably successful not only in the United Kingdom and in the USA but also throughout Europe and indeed on a world wide basis. This was at a time when English novels were banned in Germany and yet novels by Cronin were noted in many book shops.⁷⁶ Klemperer also observed that Cronin was Scottish and was exposing the shortcomings of social and public services in England.⁷⁷ *The Citadel* was also received favourably in the Soviet Union where it had a marked effect in medical circles when first published.⁷⁸ Victor Gollancz would have been comfortable with this aspect of the novel's success, in view of his strong socialist leanings and at one time communist sympathies. Later in the year *The Citadel* was published (1937), Gollancz published a book entitled *Socialised Medicine: The Russian Experience* by Henry Sigerist.⁷⁹ This book describes a system in Russia where all doctors are salaried by the state, which provides full expenses for doctors to attend courses on a regular basis. This highlighted an area which Cronin felt was grossly deficient in the British system. Sigerist was at that time working as an academic at Johns Hopkins and unashamedly showed his admiration for the Russian system and indeed all things Russian. Needless to say this did not go down well in the USA and led ultimately to Sigerist being forced to return to Europe.⁸⁰ *The Citadel* was also popular in many of the Eastern Bloc Communist countries and some used the book as anti-British propaganda in the run up to World War Two.⁸¹ This would certainly not have been Cronin's intention. He was patriotic and vigorously defended his contribution to the war effort in both World Wars. Although such patriotism could be linked to the Soviet Union, there is no evidence that Cronin had sympathies or

⁷⁵ A. J. Cronin, 'Last Will and Testament': in A. J. Cronin, Local History File, Dumbarton Library Heritage Centre.

⁷⁶ Victor Klemperer, *To the Bitter End: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, 1942-1945* (London 1999), p. 294.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ R. McKibbin, 651-78.

⁷⁹ Henry E. Sigerist, *Socialised Medicine: The Russian Experience* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1937).

⁸⁰ Charles Webster, Personal communication by email, 30 September 2020. With permission.

⁸¹ R. McKibbin, 651-78.

links to that nation. He was proud of his military service and also that of his two elder sons and was distressed by the suggestion in *The Sunday Pictorial*, when he went to live in the USA, that he was a pacifist and war dodger.⁸² The paper attempted to support its case by quoting from the principal character in *The Keys of the Kingdom*: ‘We send millions of our faithful sons to be maimed and slaughtered...with a hypocritical smile and an apostolic blessing.’⁸³ Cronin refuted this and added that all of his articles and works had been motivated towards the preservation of democracy and the destruction of totalitarianism.⁸⁴

In summary, it is clear that Cronin's personal life and his political views were key components in his novels and were woven intricately together with the many experiences of his eleven years as a doctor. Even his later novels revealed a remarkable recall of medical and personal events and he expertly used them to enliven the narrative.

⁸² Anon, ‘What is Cronin Up to?’ *Sunday Pictorial*, 2 November, 1941, p. 1.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Cronin files at Orion Book Archives. A. J. Cronin to Victor Gollancz, 19 December, 1941.

Chapter 5:

The Relative Roles of Aneurin Bevan, Andrew Manson (the Principal Character in *The Citadel*), *The Citadel* and A. J. Cronin in the Founding of the NHS

5.1 Aneurin Bevan

No discussion in regard to the founding of the NHS can be complete without reflection on the role played by Aneurin Bevan (1897-1960) who was a native of Tredegar.¹ He was born the year after Cronin and was the sixth of ten children. His father was a miner and both parents were religious, although as with Cronin's parents, it was a 'mixed marriage', Bevan's father being Baptist and his mother Methodist. Religion was also an important part of Bevan's upbringing with the life pattern of most people in South Wales being to work six days and to attend church every Sunday. The Bevan family, like the Cronins, were not financially well off, but there is no evidence that Bevan suffered the kind of religious traumas that affected Cronin. However, Bevan was bullied by his teachers and fellow pupils at school because of a speech impediment. He left school at thirteen without any qualifications but was well read and had a great appreciation of music. He completed his education at the Central Labour College in London after winning a scholarship through exams. He had already joined the Labour Party in Tredegar and had stood (unsuccessfully) at the age of twenty-one as a Labour councillor. Bevan identified unequivocally with the principles of socialism. In his book of essays, Bevan speaks of the crucial importance of preventative medicine and that this can only be achieved by collective action and not by individuals seeking financial gain. He specifically mentions the contributions made by pioneers such as Pasteur, Simpson, Jenner, Lister and Fleming stating that 'they were dedicated men whose work was inspired by values that have nothing to do with the rapacious bustle of the stock exchange'.² Bevan, like Owen in *The Citadel*, alludes to the importance of sanitation, emphasising the role of Medical officers of Health in driving good sanitation for all. Bevan berates:

The small well-to-do classes who furnish themselves with some of the machinery of good sanitation and having satisfied their own needs, they

¹ Bevan was addressed disdainfully by Winston Churchill as Bevanne and the Minister for Disease.

² Aneurin Bevan, *In Place of Fear* (William Heinemann, 1952), p. 99.

fight strenuously against finding the money to pay for a good general system that would make the same conveniences available to everyone else.³

The biographies of Nick Thomas-Symonds⁴ and Michael Foot⁵ mention the influence on Bevan of Walter Conway, the key figure in the Tredegar Medical Aid Society (TMAS) and a strong socialist. He mentored Bevan in regard to public speaking, telling him ‘prepare your speeches and research your subject in detail’.⁶ Bevan followed this advice to the letter, always rigorously rehearsed his speeches and considered Conway’s advice the best he ever had.⁷ The TMAS planted a seed in Bevan’s mind and some of the ideas developed there stimulated his interest in the best and fairest way to deliver health care. It is a commonly held view that the TMAS was a model for the NHS⁸ but Charles Webster, a distinguished historian on the NHS, states otherwise:

When I was researching the early period of Bevan’s tenure as health Minister, all the records tended to indicate that he was scathing about the Medical Aid Societies of South Wales and intensely disliked any suggestion that the health service was in any way associated with such organisations. This instinct even caused him to be suspicious of the health centre idea, about which, curiously, and against dominant opinion in his own party, he failed to advance. Bevan wanted a decisive break with the past and looked to the new Regional Hospital Boards for leadership, thereby tending to regard anything to do with primary care as a dead end.⁹

The major difference between the TMAS and Bevan’s concept of an NHS was that he wanted any future NHS to be funded solely from national taxation whereas the TMAS was funded by specific contributions from the miners and their employers. Bevan served on the Hospital Committee in the

³ Ibid., p. 98.

⁴ Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds, *Nye: The Political Life of Aneurin Bevan* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2014).

⁵ Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography: Volume 2: 1945-1960* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1973).

⁶ Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (University of Wales Press, 1993), p. 202.

⁷ Aneurin Bevan: ‘The Best Advice I Ever Had’, *Readers Digest*, October 1953, p. 378.

⁸ NHS 70: ‘We will Tredegar-ise the rest of you’, *South Wales Argus*, 2018. Available: <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/16334612.nhs-70-we-will-tredegar-ise-the-rest-of-you>.

⁹ Charles Webster, Personal Communication by email, 12 March 2020. With permission.

TMAS towards the end of Cronin's tenure in Tredegar. The biography by Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds addresses this in some detail.¹⁰

There is no documentation of a meeting between Bevan and Cronin although it does seem possible that they met. Welsh writer and broadcaster Phil Carradice, recounted an interview with George Thomas (former speaker of the House of Commons) in 1991/1992 during which Thomas told him that Bevan and Cronin had met up by accident and had discussed the concept of an NHS.¹¹ Carradice added that given the size of Tredegar and their mutual involvement in the TMAS, he would have been amazed if the two men had not met.¹² Cronin describes in *The Citadel* a miner named Bevan which was a fairly common name in South Wales.¹³ However he also uses the name Aneurin for the discredited bank manager in *The Citadel*.¹⁴ Aneurin was not a common name and therefore it is feasible to link Cronin's choice of the name Aneurin to Aneurin Bevan.¹⁵ Certainly Cronin would have known about Bevan by the time he wrote *The Citadel* in 1937 as Bevan was then a prominent MP, although Cronin could not have known that Bevan would become the political driving force in the founding of the NHS.

Bevan would be the first to agree that there were two important events in advance of his proposals which contributed to the founding of the NHS. The first involved his fellow Welshman, David Lloyd George, who was responsible for the *National Insurance Act* (1911),¹⁶ which decreed that everyone who was working, or was in need of maternity care, or had tuberculosis was eligible for treatment. The workers had to pay a stamp every week to cover this although no provision was made for the unemployed or children. The second related to the mandated reorganisation of acute hospital care during World War Two. This brought acute care under the wing of the municipal hospitals with funding through Central

¹⁰ Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds p. 39.

¹¹ Phil Carradice, Personal Communication by email, 5 December 2018. By permission.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 190.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁵ Christopher Meredith, 'Cronin and the Chronotope: Place, Time and Pessimistic Individualism in *The Citadel*', *The North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 8 (2013), 50-65.

¹⁶ Parliament of the United Kingdom, *The National Insurance Act*, 1911, c.55.

Government. There were rumblings for political change in the run up to this War, as there were ninety-three public hospitals being provided by forty-three local authorities and a further forty-eight voluntary hospitals.¹⁷ Webster states that the *Luftwaffe* achieved in months what had defeated politicians and planners for years,¹⁸ and this by chance facilitated Bevan's plan to include all hospitals within the NHS.¹⁹ It is worth emphasising that reorganisation of health provision was very much a UK effort with all four nations working together.

The Beveridge Report of 1943 made the case for a NHS very persuasively.²⁰ Beveridge was, like Lloyd George, a Liberal, but his report was welcomed widely by members of the Labour Party including Bevan.²¹ The basis of *The Beveridge Report* centred on the five great evils of society—squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease and was the template for the 1944 White Paper on a possible NHS.²² This formed the basis of a political commitment to a free Health Service. When Labour came to power in 1945, Bevan was appointed Secretary of State for Health and the following year *The National Health Service Act for England* was published.²³ Throughout that time the concept of an NHS was deeply unpopular within the Medical Profession, a plebiscite revealing a vote of more than eight to one being opposed to the NHS Bill²⁴ and without their specified changes to the Bill being adopted, doctors would refuse to join the NHS.²⁵ One letter to the *British Medical Journal* described Bevan as a 'complete and uncontrolled dictator and cooperative doctors as "quizlings"'.²⁶ In response Bevan accused the BMA of engaging in 'a squalid political conspiracy'

¹⁷ Welsh Board of Health, *Hospital Survey: The Hospital Services of South Wales and Monmouthshire* (London: HMSO, 1945) p.48.

¹⁸ Charles Webster, p. 6.

¹⁹ This was a major bone of contention with the medical profession who were keen to maintain local control over hospitals. This added to their strong opposition to the concept of an NHS and mirrors their dislike of *The Citadel*.

²⁰ Sir William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services, Cmd 6404* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1942).

²¹ Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds, p. 113.

²² A National Health Service, *The White Paper Proposals in Brief* (HMSO London, 1944).

²³ National Health Service Act (HMSO London, 6 November 1946).

²⁴ John E. Pater, p. 157.

²⁵ British Medical Association special Representative Meeting: Demand for Changes to the Act, *British Medical Journal*, vol. 14,551 (27 March 1948), supplement, 17-18.

²⁶ Cal Flynn, *The Birth of Britain's National Health Service*, Wellcome [Collection.org](https://www.wellcomecollection.org), 21 June 2019.

and ‘organising a whole-scale resistance to the implementation of an Act of Parliament’.²⁷ Cronin, like Bevan, was not well regarded by medical establishment organisations, such as the BMA, due to perceived betrayal from the criticisms within *The Citadel*. It would appear then that many doctors were more interested in self-protection and the status quo and did not take kindly to any kind of criticism or suggested improvements in how they delivered health care. Bevan was determined that any NHS would be all-encompassing including the municipal and voluntary hospitals which were run in a variable way and reflected the financial status of the area they served. They were also dominated by doctors who saw it as their fiefdom partly because they formed a basis for lucrative private practice. Bevan also wanted other aspects of health care such as dentistry included in the NHS and the removal of such parts of health care precipitated his resignation in 1951. The inclusion of all voluntary and public health hospitals within the NHS was eventually agreed through skilled negotiations, with Bevan finally achieving reluctant agreement from the BMA and the Medical Royal Colleges. Bevan could be regarded as a pragmatic socialist as demonstrated by his concessions in regard to continued private practice within NHS facilities, the institution of merit awards and the predominant per-capita payment for GPs. There seems little doubt that without Bevan the NHS would not have come to pass in 1948, or if it did, it would have not been in such a comprehensive form.

5.2 Andrew Manson and the NHS

Andrew Manson, the principal character *The Citadel*, had, like Cronin, a challenging childhood. Manson’s father had been killed during World War One, having left the family affairs ‘in a sad muddle’²⁸ and his mother had succumbed to Tuberculosis when he was eighteen. Like Manson, Cronin had a parent who died from Tuberculosis and this had a lifelong effect on his writings and may have influenced his decision to study medicine, although he never alludes to this. Tuberculosis is mentioned many times throughout Cronin’s novels and indeed an aspect of this dominates the climax of *The Citadel*. It is worth noting that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Tuberculosis was endemic in many parts of the world and carried an extremely high mortality in those who developed active infection. Glasgow had in the early twentieth century many wards in the Poor Law facilities and in the Voluntary Hospitals dedicated to the care of patients with

²⁷ Aneurin Bevan, ‘Speech to the House of Commons on the Appointed Day for the NHS’, Hansard, House of Commons Debates, vol.447, cols. 35/50, 6 February 1948.

²⁸ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 20.

Tuberculosis.²⁹ Manson experiences at first hand the hardship and deprivation which also characterised Bevan's early life and was a factor in Gollancz's high regard for the novel and his decision to vigorously promote it.

Manson is sympathetic to the miners and concerned about the poor state of health care available prior to arriving in Aberlaw (Tredegar). One of the more dramatic moments in the book is when Manson, with a colleague, blows up a sewer which was the source of an outbreak of Typhoid (based on a true incident but not involving Cronin).³⁰ Manson's colleague rejects his suggestion to write letters to the Ministry of Health, as this would not evoke any response for several months. Manson is scathing of the local Public Health doctor and hence the reason for the drastic action which has the desired effect in that a new sewer is built. Other examples of Andrew Manson's frustrations with bureaucracy are his decision to leave his position as inspector of mines and his difficulty in contacting a public health officer because: 'You'll never find Dr Griffiths in Toniglen this hour of the day. He do go to the golf at Swansea, afternoons mostly.'³¹ There are a number of examples³² in Cronin's novels of bureaucratic inefficiency and medical lethargy which he was concerned would have featured in any nationalised health service.³³

Andrew Manson is impressed with some aspects of the Medical Aid Society and believes that the model of care is a good one. The organisation has key facilities, including a hospital, unlike his previous post in Blaenelly, where a colleague warned him: 'There's no hospital, no ambulance, no X-rays, no anything. If you want to operate, you use the kitchen table.'³⁴ Christopher Meredith, who was from Tredegar, states that 'Manson projects a mixture of common decency and ignorance among the miners and does not portray any sense of intellectual and political sensibility or capacity for constructive collective action'.³⁵ Manson observes at his interview for the Medical Aid Society thirty smokers in a committee room being manipulated by the secretary and the senior doctor. The secretary is certainly committed to high standards of care in the Medical Aid Society and his life is

²⁹ Sir Alexander McGregor, 'Public Health in Glasgow 1905-1946' (E. and S. Livingstone Ltd, Edinburgh and London, 1967), pp. 83-98.

³⁰ Ruth Richardson, 'The Art of Medicine', *The Lancet*, 387 (1984), 2284-2285.

³¹ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 24.

³² Further examples of Cronin's dislike of bureaucracy are found particularly in relation to public health officials in *Adventures of a Black Bag* (1947) and *Adventures in Two Worlds* (1952).

³³ A. J. Cronin, 'Socialised Medicine', pp. 1359-1360.

³⁴ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 19.

³⁵ Christopher Meredith, 8, 61.

dedicated to improving the lot of the miners. He loves the work of the Society because it is an expression of an ideal, but he also wants better housing, better sanitation and better and safer conditions not only for the miners and their dependants.³⁶

Manson, like Bevan, sees the importance of good sanitation. However, he is not impressed with the inactivity of public health officials, and is not convinced that nationalisation of health was the answer to the woes of health provision.³⁷ Manson also seems concerned in regard to the lack of efficiency of any large committee structure and considers briefly state control before rejecting it:

It's the system he thought savagely, it's senile. There ought to be some better scheme, a chance for everybody—say oh, say state control! Then he groaned remembering Dr Bigsby and the Miner's Fatigue Board. No damn it that's hopeless—bureaucracy chokes individual effort—it would suffocate me.³⁸

Manson does not offer a solution, but later in the novel he states (unlike Bevan) his attraction to group practice rather than doctors working individually. He tells his wife:

Perhaps you remember all Denny's arguments and mine too—about the hidebound GP system—how the GP is made to stagger along carrying everything on his shoulders, an impossibility! Group medicine is the answer to that—the perfect answer. It comes between state medicine and isolated individual effort. The only reason we haven't had it here is because the big men like keeping everything in their own hands.³⁹

Manson's views here are influenced by his American friend Stillman who extolls the virtues of such a system in the USA, with support for the group practice idea which Manson embarks on and which Cronin became most impressed by in the USA. In regard to the hospital setup in England, Manson is highly critical, feeling that the hospitals are too centralised and in gross need of repair, stating 'Decentralisation is the remedy..... why shouldn't our big hospitals not stand in a green belt outside London'. He also bemoans the area service where you cannot get into a hospital in your own location but have to go a fairly long distance and then states:

³⁶ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 149.

³⁷ A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 263.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

And what is being done about it—zero, absolute zero. We just drag on in the same old way, rattling tin boxes, holding flag days, making appeals, letting students clown around for pennies in fancy dress. One thing about these new European countries—they get things done.⁴⁰

Which countries Manson is referring to is unclear but it has been suggested that it was Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy.⁴¹ If that is the case, Manson through Cronin could not have been aware of the abhorrent fascist medical practices going on in these countries in the 1930s.

Manson's experience in private practice in London mirrors Cronin's own account. They become seduced by the financial benefits, female charms and moving within the higher echelons of society. However, their wives observe a change for the worse and they both eventually recognise this and change direction with Manson moving to a group practice outside London and Cronin becoming an author. Manson's speech to the GMC encapsulates many of Cronin's views about the deficiencies in pre-NHS health delivery in the UK and clearly expresses his concern about the lack of postgraduate training:

When I qualified, I was more of a menace to society than anything else. All I knew was the names of a few diseases and the drugs I was supposed to give for I couldn't even lock a pair of midwifery forceps. Anything I know, I have learned since then. But how many doctors do learn anything beyond the ordinary rudiments they pick up in practice? They haven't got time, the poor devils. They are rushed off their feet. That's where the whole organisation is rotten. We ought to be arranged in scientific units. There ought to be compulsory postgraduate education. There ought to be a great attempt to bring science to the front line, to do away with the old bottle-of-medicine, to give every practitioner the opportunity, a chance to study, a chance to cooperate in research.⁴²

These observations highlighted the need to plan for and deliver a structured programme of postgraduate training and education in the UK.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 326.

⁴¹ R. McKibbin, 651-78.

⁴² A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 442.

⁴³ This theme will be developed later in this chapter.

5.3 The Citadel and the NHS.

Although the role played by Bevan and the views of Andrew Manson and Cronin are germane to the aims of this thesis, a key issue relates to the novel itself which brings into focus, through the plot, the implications of substandard and poorly organised health with vested interests taking precedence over high quality health care. There was a dynamism about *The Citadel* which contributed to its popularity and the ingredients worked in concert with the powerful story of a young man from a deprived background who lost his parents at an early age, thereafter making his way through university, courtesy of a funded scholarship. The plot develops further with the lone hero struggling against committees and bureaucracy, becoming corrupted, and then achieving redemption. As previously discussed this has a ring of kailyard writing but in many ways this book steers a course between kailyard and anti-kailyard as represented by the tragic death of a patient, a miscarriage and the death of the hero's wife. Within that, the narrator uses his experience as a doctor to reflect on the state of health care delivery and the intrinsic unfairness of money securing the best care. Substandard and unethical practices are graphically described and this captured the public imagination at a time when as previously noted the medical profession was on a pedestal.

Very little progress was made in improving health provision within the UK in the inter-war years. The BMA report of 1938⁴⁴ recommended similar changes to that of the report by Lord Dawson of Penn in 1920.⁴⁵ In 1937, the year of publication of *The Citadel*, the Non-partisan Policy and Planning Unit issued a report on British Health Services, which was widely read and was highly critical of health service delivery with recommendations on the need for change.⁴⁶ Many segments of society were unhappy with the way health provision was being delivered. The non-insured were unwilling to call for help because of the cost and those who were insured were unlikely to stay off work when unwell because of the poor level of sickness benefit. There was a wide variation between parts of the country in the provision of investigative and treatment services, the time for change was over-ripe and the public were becoming more and more engaged with the need for change.⁴⁷ A Gallup Poll around that time revealed that 71% of the public were in favour of

⁴⁴ A British Medical Association Pamphlet, *The British Medical Association's proposals for a General Medical Service for the Nation*, 1938.

⁴⁵ *Interim Report on the Future Provision of Medical and Allied Services*, Lord Dawson of Penn, Ministry of Health: consultative council on medical and allied services (His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1920), 2.

⁴⁶ Policy and Planning Unit, *Report on the British Health Service: A Survey of the Existing Health Services in Great Britain, with Proposals for Future Development* (London: PEP) December 1937.

⁴⁷ John E. Pater, p. 20.

nationalisation of the hospitals.⁴⁸ Although fortuitous in the timing of release, 1937 was an ideal year for the public to fasten onto *The Citadel* because of the issues it raised and because it was authored by a former member of the medical profession. Despite the gap between Cronin practising as a doctor and the publication of the book, there was no issue with the novel being out of date. The fact is that many aspects of medical care had been static between the two World Wars, and therefore Cronin's observations in the novel were just as relevant and accurate as they would have been during his time in practice in the previous decade. Therefore, the impact of *The Citadel* was enhanced by the timing of its publication in 1937 as in the period leading up to World War Two, there was an increasing public interest in regard to health delivery.

It is clear that Cronin captures this zeitgeist in *The Citadel* in a variety of ways. The first was its popularity among the general public, their vested interest in this area, an appetite for the story line and the subject matter of health inequality and poor standards of care. The second was the timing of the novel's release just prior to World War Two and the fact that it maintained its popularity throughout that War when discussion and reports were being formulated regarding a nationalised system of health in the UK. Thirdly, the general public was ready for a change in the way health care was delivered well before the commencement of World War Two. The support for change continued after World War Two and the election win for the Labour Party in 1945 confirmed that the population were ready for change. Furthermore, the reprint of the novel and re-release of the film in 1946 would only have brought *The Citadel* and the issues it raised back into focus thus re-awakening its earlier unpopularity with the medical establishment. Organisations such as the BMA may have seen this as a ploy to add support to future nationalisation and reorganisation of health services which they deeply opposed right up to the year of its commencement.

The long-lasting debate regarding the influence of *The Citadel* on the founding of the NHS continues, with relatively little attention being paid to a number of other issues it raised regarding the medical profession. An example of this is the absence of post-graduate training with the narrator describing Manson's feeling of inadequacy on his graduation. This may well have been a factor in the commissioning of *The Goodenough Report*⁴⁹ which set out a plan for improved postgraduate training and in particular the requirement for a compulsory year in hospital following graduation

⁴⁸ Gallup Poll, *Are You in favour of hospitals becoming a public service?* (February 1939), as quoted in R. McKibbin, p. 665.

⁴⁹ The Goodenough Report, 'Training of Doctors', *British Medical Journal*, 2, 1944, 121-123.

(pre-registration year). Calman⁵⁰ emphasises the importance of *The Citadel* in raising a number of key issues regarding medical ethics which were not sufficiently addressed in medical curricula until the 1980's.⁵¹ One such issue related to fee-splitting, where doctors received a share of the fee for passing a patient onto a colleague. This financial incentive lowered the threshold for referrals and at times there was no indication for such a referral. This led to a Ministry of Health enquiry into the whole issue of fee-splitting.⁵² Other ethical issues raised in the novel included how to identify and support poorly performing doctors, alcoholism within the profession and differences of opinion with patients on moral issues. These issues are all good examples of topics which form part of a module now embedded in medical students' curricula.⁵³

It could be argued that the momentum for a National Health Service was already in train before 1937 and neither a novel in favour of or against it would have made any difference. This argument is strengthened by Bevan's rejection of modelling the NHS on the South Wales Workman's Medical Aid Societies.⁵⁴ Bevan made it clear to the representatives of the aid societies that there would be no insurance-based schemes. He also rejected the concept of group based general practice which was promoted in *The Citadel*. Despite repeated assertions in the literature, my research has been unable to find any evidence that Bevan made the statement that he was going to Tredegarise the whole country. *The Citadel* however may well have created a *milieu* for public support for a change in the way health services were delivered by highlighting the inequity of access to health services and the poor standards of health care. Through this, it may also have contributed to and been symptomatic of a political will for change as witnessed by the Labour Party's landslide victory in 1945.

Herman Melville, in *White Jacket* (1850)⁵⁵ vividly describes the practice of flogging in the United States Navy. Following publication, this novel was sent to every member of Congress⁵⁶ to

⁵⁰ Kenneth Calman, 'The Citadel by A. J. Cronin' in *The Bottle Imp*, Issue 15, ed. by Gwen Enstam, Duncan Jones (Association for Scottish Literary Studies, November 2014).

⁵¹ K. C. Calman, R. S. Downie, 'Practical Problems in the Teaching of Ethics to Medical Students', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 3, 1987, 153-156.

⁵² Ministry of Health Report on Fee splitting, in Dale Salwak, *A. J. Cronin* (Twayne Publishers, 1985).

⁵³ K. C. Calman, R. S. Downie, 153-156.

⁵⁴ Charles Webster, Personal Communication by email, 12 March 2020. With Permission.

⁵⁵ Herman Melville, *White Jacket* (London: Richard Bentley, 1850).

⁵⁶ As noted previously Victor Gollancz sent 200 copies of *The Citadel* to the British Medical Association shortly after publication. Unlike Herman Melville who sent copies to Congress, this may have been as much a publicity stunt to increase sales as to influence the medical establishment's forward planning.

ensure they were aware of such brutal practices. The novel was regarded as being instrumental in the subsequent abolishment of the practice of flogging in the USA. Charles Dickens, in *Bleak House*⁵⁷, uses the character of Joe the crossing sweeper, to depict the abject poverty of many young people in London. At the time of Joe's death, Allan Woodcourt states:

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.⁵⁸

Dickens may have hoped that the inclusion of Queen Victoria would deliver support for reducing poverty and destitution as exemplified in Joe. It is a matter of conjecture whether Cronin specifically wrote *The Citadel* to bring about societal change or to provide a captivating story which included an exposure of the deficiencies in health care in the UK.

5.4 A. J. Cronin and The NHS

There is so much autobiographical information in many of Cronin's novels that it is a challenge to decipher whether the views expressed are those of the narrator, or the main characters, or both, or to what extent they are those of A. J. Cronin. *Adventures in Two Worlds* (1952) is the nearest of his novels to an autobiography and he specifically mentions Aneurin Bevan by name in this novel. This is important as it refers to the NHS and Cronin's view on the influence of the Tredegar Medical Aid Society:

Under the medical aid scheme which had engaged me, all the miners paid a small weekly contribution to the society and were entitled thereby to free medical treatment for their families and themselves. In actual fact, the scheme can definitely be regarded as the foundation of the plan for socialised medicine which was eventually adopted by Great Britain. Aneurin Bevan, who was mainly responsible for the national project, was at one time a miner in Tredegar, and here, under the local aid organisation, the value of prompt and gratuitous treatment for the worker was strongly impressed on him.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Bradbury and Evans, 1853).

⁵⁸ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Penguin Books, 1971), p. 705.

⁵⁹ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, p. 140.

Cronin then reveals considerable reservations about some aspects of the local scheme :

There is certainly virtue in this scheme but it also has defects, of which, in Tredegar the chief one was this - with complete *carte blanche* in the way of medical attention, the people were not sparing, by day or by night, in 'fetching the doctor'. In a word the plan fostered hypochondriacs, malingerers, and those obnoxious 'hangers-on' who haunt a doctor's surgery in the hope of obtaining something — spectacles, crepe bandages, cottonwool and dressings, even a Seidlitz powder for nothing. My real invalids were numerous but I also had to deal with the other sort.⁶⁰

He then gives examples of what he regarded as malingerers and these were not confined to the miners. He describes one woman who called him at 0200 hrs from her comfortable bed, complaining of yawning. The principal character's response was 'Then shut your b— mouth'. Stephen Thompson, who had written extensively about Medical Aid Societies, told me in a personal communication that he felt Cronin had a similar view to the BMA about Medical Aid Societies.⁶¹ They did not like doctors having to be accountable to the societies or the committees having the power to hire and fire doctors. Thompson goes on to state:

I think that antipathy comes through in Cronin's work—ignorant workman challenging medical expertise, schemes succeeding as a result of the doctors and in spite of workmen's committees and unsatisfactory employment conditions for doctors who existed in some sort of bondage.⁶²

Thus it is evident that Cronin, like Bevan, had reservations about such medical aid systems. Dr Julian-Tudor Hart who was a famous Welsh GP and academic does not write in complementary terms about Cronin, stating:

Cronin's scorn for the pompous swindlers in Harley Street legitimised everything else he wrote overlooking what I see as an unimaginative and patronising view of industrial general practice. It was based on only three

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Stephen Thompson, Personal Communication by email, 7 April 2020. With permission.

⁶² Ibid.

years experience before he escaped to become an instantly successful writer.⁶³

Tudor-Hart further states that:

Cronin did nothing to encourage or support his colleagues who campaigned for a free and universally available NHS or to help them to defend and extend the NHS after 1948. He devoted himself entirely to production of further sentimental best-sellers and accumulation of royalties.⁶⁴

Tudor-Hart was a member of the Communist Party⁶⁵ and would have disapproved of and resented the immense wealth Cronin accumulated. This may have explained what appears to be an unusually negative view of the novel. He fails to mention the immense popularity of *The Citadel* in the Soviet Bloc.⁶⁶ Tudor-Hart, however, did admit to having read *The Citadel* as a young man and that this influenced his decision to study medicine.⁶⁷

Shortly after *The Citadel* was published, a most revealing and essentially unknown article was published in *The Listener* entitled ‘Socialised Medicine’.⁶⁸ It was given to me by the Cronin family⁶⁹ and has never been previously referred to in any of the extensive documents reviewed to date. *The Listener* article was a typescript of a broadcast by Cronin on 14 December 1937 from the USA and relayed to the UK in collaboration with the Columbia Broadcasting System. The title is the same as that used by Sigerist in his book about health care delivery in Russia.⁷⁰ as noted in chapter four. Cronin begins in a fairly light-hearted way, by stating that the broadcast is not intended to be academic but is aimed at Jones of Main and Smith of Surbiton. He then states that the question of the relationship between the doctor and the community has been very much before the public in America and England over the previous few months, since the release of *The Citadel*,

⁶³ Julian Tudor-Hart ‘Storming the Citadel: From Romantic Fiction to Effective Reality.’ *Health and Society in Twentieth Century Wales* (University of Wales Press 2006), p. 209.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Lord Neil Kinnock, Personal communication by email, 3 March, 2021, With permission.

⁶⁶ R. McKibbin, 651-678.

⁶⁷ Julian Tudor-Hart, p. 213.

⁶⁸ A. J. Cronin, ‘Socialised Medicine’ *The Listener*, December 1937, pp. 1359-1360.

⁶⁹ Specifically and most helpfully by Cronin’s Granddaughter Diana Cronin.

⁷⁰ Henry E. Sigerist, *Socialised Medicine*.

and that each country had the opportunity to learn from the other.⁷¹ Cronin then discusses the concept of group practice in the USA which he praises in *The Citadel*⁷² and also extols in this broadcast. He speaks of the need for individual doctors with a particular area of expertise within a group of, say, twelve doctors. He is quick to emphasise that this was not a criticism of English GPs, saying ‘I intensely admire them’. He blames the system and feels that such a change would no longer make their life a dog’s life and also give them more time for postgraduate study. This is also mentioned by Andrew Manson in *The Citadel*⁷³ and referred to in 5.2 above.

Cronin next turns his attention to the issue of National Insurance. He provides examples of how poorly patients are treated in the USA unless they are very rich or very poor. He states that the insurance system, then in operation in England, protects patients from such substandard care. His view was that the system in England was popular and financially advantageous to the doctors and then states:

It is not a perfect system. It has minor disadvantages, but now that I have seen something of the medical set up on this side of the Atlantic (USA), I feel increasingly proud of our (England’s) National Health Insurance.⁷⁴

Cronin then discusses the possible role of the State. He posits that the concept of Socialised Medicine in the USA being regarded as the equivalent of control by the State. He tells us that he is as opposed to it as the medical profession in the USA and that ‘State Medicine in my opinion spells disaster for doctor and patient alike’. He suggests that the answer in the USA may also be some form of national insurance system coupled with more emphasis on prevention rather than cure. Cronin then reflects on the wisdom of the Far East where the Chinese paid their doctors when their patients were well but stopped paying when they were ill thus emphasising the benefits of preventive medicine. In *A Pocketful of Rye* (1969), Dr Laurence Carroll states, when hearing that a colleague is leaving Scotland to work in Canada, ‘Another one I thought, trying to escape from that damned nationalised medicine.’⁷⁵ From this and Cronin’s dislike of bureaucracy, it would seem that

⁷¹ It is surprising that Cronin says England rather than the UK as he was a Scotsman and he also spent time both there and in South Wales as a doctor.

⁷²A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel*, p. 392.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

⁷⁴ A. J. Cronin, ‘Socialised Medicine’, p. 1360.

⁷⁵ A. J. Cronin, *A Pocketful of Rye* (Heinemann, 1969) p. 74.

he, like some of the principal characters in his novels, was not supportive of a Nationalised Health Service.

Conclusion

A. J. Cronin was one of the most popular international best selling novelists of the twentieth century and yet to a large extent is forgotten today and has never quite achieved the critical attention that the seriousness and the cultural impact of his writings has merited. Such was the popularity of his novels, that several were made into highly successful films, featuring the great stars of the time. Cronin, however, continues to be remembered for one novel in particular, *The Citadel* (1937)¹, which is still regularly cited as having an instrumental role in the founding of the NHS and in this regard his name is often linked to Aneurin Bevan.²

The novel traces the medical career of a young, recently qualified doctor who experiences the challenges of health care delivery among the mining communities of South Wales and in the affluent setting of private practice in London. The contrast is striking with the miners being dependent on a medical aid system partly funded from their salaries and the private patients being cared for on a self-funding basis, their doctors charging for many unproven medications and participating in other corrupt practices. The climax of the novel is an appearance by the principal character at a disciplinary hearing of the General Medical Council (GMC) for supporting a sound but unproven treatment for tuberculosis. The unevenness in health care provision and the non-existent postgraduate teaching programmes are highlighted by the author whose principal character in *The Citadel* considers the option of some form of state control of health care only to reject it because of his antipathy towards bureaucracy. He uses the platform of his GMC appearance to promote the need for postgraduate education, evidence based medications and research. Cronin himself unequivocally rejects Government run health care favouring an insurance based system.³

The Citadel proved to be a spectacular and enduring triumph for Cronin, lauded internationally in many reviews and immensely popular with the general public throughout the world. It was also successfully adapted to the cinema and to television. However it was deeply unpopular with the medical establishment who resented its critical tone and its exposure of defects within health care delivery. Other establishment organisations, including film censors, also would not tolerate criticism of doctors, seeing them as professionals beyond reproach.

¹ Dr. A. J. Cronin, *The Citadel* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937).

² J. Lanner, 95, 407-408.

³ A. J. Cronin, 'Socialised Medicine', pp. 1359-1360.

Aneurin Bevan, who is acknowledged as the architect of the NHS, had indirect connections with Cronin. He was from Tredegar where Cronin worked and they were both admirers of the local medical aid system. Bevan was also acknowledged by Cronin to be the key individual in the founding of the NHS.⁴ Despite the widespread praise for the medical aid societies in South Wales, Cronin and Bevan had reservations about them. In Cronin's case it was because of the control the lay members had over doctors and in Bevan's case it was because he wanted a system that was free for all at the point of delivery and not dependent on any contributions from the public. Bevan, like Cronin, was unpopular with the medical establishment who displayed reactionary tendencies when it came to protecting their own professional practices and income. They also opposed any diminution in their control of the hospitals and in the money raising opportunities through private practice. Bevan did ultimately win over agreement from the doctors through skilled negotiation and financial incentives. Cronin also displayed tenacity in defending vigorously his criticisms of the medical profession.

The Citadel was published in 1937, eleven years before the NHS came into existence. Why was it then that this novel is considered by some as inhabiting or even helping to create the zeitgeist for the move towards an NHS? It is possible that the message from *The Citadel* fermented in the public mind during World War Two and there is no doubt that there was a mood for considerable change in health and social services after this War. The extent of the Labour victory in 1945 underscores the public's desire to support change. In addition the decision to re-publish *The Citadel* in 1946 may have thrust the novel again into a prominent and influential position. However, many other factors could justifiably claim to be of more significance than *The Citadel*. These included increasing public interest in health care, a number of key reports on the need for change and the determination of Bevan to deliver an all encompassing NHS free at the point of delivery

The Citadel is rightly regarded as an important novel for aspiring doctors to read. It is also greatly enjoyed through its gripping narrative and the medical details which could only have been displayed so effectively through Cronin's experiences in medical practice. It graphically draws attention to the deficiencies in health care and postgraduate medical education and this undoubtedly has led to improvements in these areas. However, it is my conclusion that Cronin was not a supporter of nationalisation of health and that his novel *The Citadel*, despite its positive influence on many aspects of health, may not have had the pivotal influence on the foundation of the NHS that many have hitherto believed. It might never be entirely possible to say how much impact a

⁴ A. J. Cronin, *Adventures in Two Worlds*, p. 140.

literary work has or has had as part of a climate of opinion; its appeal may be a contributing factor in an unspoken change of attitude. However, that does not make it the one ‘pivotal’ work bringing about that change. There may have been a more subtle influence brought about by timing of its release to a public in the UK already disillusioned with health provision and ready to embrace a major reorganisation. It is undeniably the case that *The Citadel* captured and helped channel the public mood and provoked discussion about the need to address the social inequalities in health delivery and the need to improve the standards of practice within the medical profession.

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