

# Archibald Joseph Cronin: a Writing-Doctor Between Literature and Film

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## Summary

This paper broaches the subject of the life and numerous cinematographic and TV adaptations of the vast and controversial literary work of Scottish doctor Archibald Joseph Cronin (1896-1981). Through it, we intend to stress the influence his books and/or the films based on them had on many young generations who, under their shelter, chose a career in medicine. Prize-winning writer and PhD, in his works -formally adorned with his great talent for description and observation- he intermingles naturalism, conflicting passions, medical situations and social criticism. Beyond all discussion about his literary career and his repercussion on film, his influence on those who embraced Medicine following in the steps of his characters, many of whom were nothing more than a reflection of himself, is unquestionable.

*Keywords:* Cronin, Doctor, Writer, Film, Literature.

*To AJ Cronin, whose works strengthened my decision to become a doctor*

## Life and work of Archibald Joseph Cronin

The writer-doctors whose works have been rescued by film making are not few. Among them, we can mention Friedrich von Schiller and his *William Tell*; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with the "Sherlock Holmes" saga, *The Lost World* and *The Time Machine*; Antón Chekhov and *The Shooting Party*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, *The Seagull*, *Lady with the Dog* and others; Axel Munthe and some of the events in *The Story of San Michele* filmed by the German film industry in 1962, Somerset Maugham with *The razor's Edge*, *Of Human Bondage*, *The Painted Veil*, *The Letter* and others<sup>1,2</sup>.

There was, however, another writer-doctor who was highly resorted to by film: Archibald Joseph Cronin. This article addresses his work and the connections between it and its cinematographic and TV adaptations.

A Scottish novelist and doctor, he was born in Cardross-on-Clyde (County of Dunbartonshire) on

19 July, 1896. An only child, his mother was Jessie Montgomerie and his father Patrick Cronin. In an apparently paradoxical way, following the death of his father, who professed Catholicism, Archibald was raised as a Catholic by his Protestant mother. During his stay at the Dumbarton Academy, sponsored by his uncle, he showed great potential as a sportsman and writer, which led him to win prizes in those fields. Living in Glasgow, he attended the Jesuit School San Luis Gonzaga and, owing to his abilities, he was awarded a scholarship to study Medicine at the local University. When the First World War broke out, he interrupted his university studies; he enrolled in the Royal Navy, and remained there until the end of the conflict, when he took up Medicine again and graduated *cum laude* in 1919. In 1921, he married Agnes Mary Gibson (May), already a doctor, who he met as a student. Archibald and Agnes then set up home in Tredegar, a small southern Welsh town where Cronin, assisted by May, did research into anthracosis while working at the town's General Hospital. His first son, Vincent, was born there and Archibald became medical inspector of mines for Great Britain, both events taking place during 1924. In 1923 he had earned a

Diploma in Public Health and again in 1924 he was awarded a degree as a Doctor in Medicine for his dissertation on the history of aneurysm. Moving to Notting Hill (London) brought him a stream of patients which noticeably improved his economic situation. His other sons -Patrick and Andrew- were born in London in 1926 and 1937 respectively. In 1930, while on holiday in the Scottish Highlands, his life took a significant turn, since the completion of his first novel in just three months, *Hatter's Castle* turned out to be a resounding success; it drove him away from medical practice and fully turned his interests towards literature. In the late 30s and in the early stages of the Second World War, he travelled to the United States with his wife and his three children. There he wrote *The Keys of the Kingdom*. As the years went by, as an already definitely established author, he returned to Europe to spend the last 25 years of his life in Switzerland, where he frequented the company of Audrey Hepburn, Charles Chaplin and Laurence Olivier. He died in the Swiss town of Montreux on 6 January, 1981<sup>3</sup>.

Celebrated as an author and with a PhD in the humanities, in his work, formally adorned by a considerable descriptive and observational capacity, he mixed passions, medical situations and social criticism. Among them, *Hatter's Castle* (1931), *Three Loves* (1932), *Grand Canary* (1933), *Kaleidoscope in "K"* (1933), *The Stars Look Down* (1935), *Country Doctor* (1935), *The Citadel* (1937) - which is thought to be responsible for

promoting a change in the Public Health System in the United Kingdom after the Second World War -, *Vigil in the Night* (1939), *Jupiter Laughs* (a comedy in three acts, 1940), *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1941), *Adventures of a Black Bag* (1943 - revised in 1969 -), *The Green Years* (1944), *Shannon's Way* (1948) – a sequel to the preceding one -, *The Spanish Gardener* (1950), *The Valorous Years* (1950), *Adventures in Two Worlds* (autobiographical, 1952), *Beyond This Place* (1953), *Crusader's Tomb* (1956), *The Northern Light* (1958), *The Cronin Omnibus* (1958), *The innkeeper's wife* (1958), *The Native Doctor* (or *An Apple in Eden*) (1959), *The Judas Tree* (1961), *A Song of Sixpence* (1964) and its sequel: *A Pocketful of Rye* (1969), (1966), *The Minstrel Boy* (or *Desmonde*) (1975), *Lady with Carnations* (1976), *Gracie Lindsay* (1978), and *Doctor Finlay of Tannochbrae* (1978). In addition, between 1939 and 1966, he made around 25 periodical contributions to *Reader's Digest*<sup>3</sup>.

**From literature to film**

His novels adapted for films<sup>4</sup> are referred to in table 1.

Table 2 shows the TV adaptations of Cronin's works<sup>4</sup>.

Perhaps the rising generations will remember AJ Cronin for his novel *Country Doctor* in which he introduced the character of the Scottish doctor Finlay, who was the basis of successful TV series for the BBC from

Table 1. Cinematographic adaptations of AJ Cronin's work

English title	Spanish title	Year	Director	Screenplay	Main characters	Other data
<i>Once to Every Woman</i> (adaptation of "Kaleidoscopio en K")	Not released in Spain	1934	Lambert Hillyer	Jo Swerling	Ralph Bellamy, Fay Wray, Walter Connolly, Mary Carlisle	USA Columbia Pictures Drama Black and white 70 minutes
<i>Grand Canary</i>	Not released in Spain	1934	Irving Cummings	Ernest Pascal	Warner Baxter, Madge Evans, Marjorie Rambeau, Zita Johann	USA Fox Film Corp. Drama Black and white 78 minutes
<i>The Citadel</i>	<i>La Ciudadela</i>	1938	King Vidor	Ian Dalrymple, Frank Wead, Elizabeth Hill	Robert Donat, Rosalind Russell, Ralph Richardson, Rex Harrison	USA MGM Drama Black and white 110 minutes 4 Oscar nominations

Table 1 (continued). Cinematographic adaptations of AJ Cronin's work

Título en inglés	Título en español	Año	Director	Guión	Protagonistas	Otros datos
<i>The Stars Look Down</i>	<i>Las estrellas miran hacia abajo/ La avalancha</i>	1940	Carol Reed	A. Coppel, JB Williams	Michael Redgrave, Margaret Lockwood, Emyln Williams, Nancy Price	GB Grafton Films Drama Black and white 110 minutes
<i>Vigil in the Night</i>	<i>Noche de Angustia</i>	1940	George Stevens	Fred Guiol, PJ Wolfson, Rowland Leigh	Carole Lombard, Brian Aherne, Anne Shirley, Julien Mitchell	USA RKO Radio Pictures Drama Black and white 96/102 minutes
<i>Shining Victory</i> (adaptation of "Jupiter Laughs")	Not released in Spain	1941	Irving Rapper	Howard Koch, Anne Froelich	James Stephenson, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Donald Crisp, Bette Davis	USA Warner Bros First National Pictures Inc. Drama Black and white 80 minutes
<i>Hatter's Castle</i>	<i>El castillo del odio</i>	1942	Lance Comfort	Paul Merzbach, Rudolph Bernauer, Rodney Ackland	Robert Newton, Deborah Kerr, James Mason, Emyln Williams	GB Paramount British Pictures Drama Black and white 102 minutes
<i>The Keys of the Kingdom</i>	<i>Las llaves del reino</i>	1944	John M Stahl	Nunnally Johnson, Joseph L Mankiewicz	Gregory Peck, Tomas Mitchell, Vincent Prince, Rose Stradner	USA 20th Century Fox Drama Black and white 137 minutes 4 Oscar nominations
<i>The Green Years</i>	<i>Los Verdes Años</i>	1946	Victor Saville	Robert Ardrey, Sonya Levien	Charles Coburn, Tom Drake, Beverly Tyler, Hume Cronyn	USA MGM Drama Black and white 127 minutes 2 Oscar nominations
<i>Ich suche dich</i> (adaptation of "Jupiter Laughs")	<i>Seguiré tu camino</i>	1956	O.W. Fischer	O.W. Fischer, Claus Hardt, Gerhard Menzel, Martin Morlock	O.W. Fischer, Anouk Aimée, Nadja Tiller, Otto Brüggemann	Germany Aura Drama Black and white 95 minutes
<i>The Spanish Gardener</i>	<i>El jardinero español</i>	1957	Philip Leacock	Lesley Storm, John Bryan	Dirk Bogarde, Jon Whiteley, Michael Hordern, Cyril Cusack	GB The Rank Organisation Drama 88/97 minutes

Table 1 (continued). Cinematographic adaptations of AJ Cronin's work

Título en inglés	Título en español	Año	Director	Guión	Protagonistas	Otros datos
<i>Beyond This Place</i>	<i>El secreto de ushaw 52</i>	1959	Jack Cardiff	Kenneth Hyde, Ken Taylor	Van Johnson, Vera Miles, Emyln Williams, Bernard Lee	GB Georgefield Productions Misterio Black and white 90 minutes
<i>Kalapani</i> (adaptation of "Beyond This Place")	Not released in Spain	1958	Raj Khosla	G.R. Kamat, Bhappi Sonie, Anand Pal	Dev Anand, Madhubala, Nalini Jaywant, Agha	India Navketan films Policia Musical Romantic Black and white 164 minutes
<i>Pula Rangadu</i> (adaptation of "Beyond This Place")	Not released in Spain	1967	Adurthi Subba Rao	Venkata Ramana, Mullapoodi, Ranganayakamma Muppala	Akkineni Nageshwar Rao, Jamuna, Vijaya Nirmala, Chittor V. Nagaiah	India Annapoorna Pictures Drama Black and white ¿? minutes
<i>Tere Mere Sapne</i> (adaptation of "The Citadel")	Not released in Spain	1971	Vijay Anand	Vijay Anand, Kaushal Bharati	Dev Anand, Mumtaz, Mahesh Kaul, Vijay Anand	India Kamat Foto Flash Lekhraj & Co. Drama Musical Colour 175 minutes
<i>Mausam</i> (adaptation of "The Judas Tree")	Not released in Spain	1975	Sampooran Singh Gulzar	Bhushan Banmali, Kamleshwar, Sampooran Singh Gulzar	Sharmila Tagore, Sanjeev Kumar, Om Shivpuri, Agha	India Sunandini Pictures Musical Musical Romance Colour 156 minutes
<i>Tooi Asbita</i> (adaptation of "Beyond this Place")		1979	Tatsumi Kumashiro	Masaru Baba	Tomokazu Miura, Ayumi Ishida, Junko Miyashita, Tomisaburo Wakayama	Japón Toho Film (Eiga) Co. Ltd. Drama Colour 95 minutes
<i>Billy Elliot</i> (adaptation of "The Stars Look Down")	<i>Billy Elliot</i> ( <i>Quiero bailar</i> )	2000	Stephen Daldry	Lee Hall	Jamie Bell, Jean Heywood, Julie Walters, Gary Lewis	GB, BBC Drama Colour 111 minutes

1962 to 1971, as well as of others for Scottish television produced by Scottish Television and PBS. Dr Finlay also

appeared in a radio series in the 70s, which derived in later adaptations much closer in time: 2001 and 2002.

Table 2. TV adaptations of AJ Cronin's work

Original title	Year	Director	Screenplay	Main characters	Other data
<i>Escape from Fear</i> [Episode from the series "Climax!" (1954)]	1955	Allen Reisner	Bernard Girard	William Lundigan, Tristram Coffin, Mari Blanchard, Howard Duff	USA CBS 1 episode Drama Black and white
Beyond this Place [Episode from the series "The DuPont Show of the Month" (1957)]	1957	Sidney Lumet	Vance Bourjaily	Farley Granger, Peggy Ann Garner, Torin Thatcher, Max Adrian	USA CBS 1 episode Drama Comedy 90 minutes Black and white
<i>Nicholas</i> (Series which adapts "The Spanish Gardener")	1958	Júlio Gouveia	AJ Cronin	Ricardinho Roberto de Cleto Rafael Golombeck	Brasil TV Tupi Black and white
<i>The Citadel</i> (Film)	1960	No se registra	Dale Wasserman	Ann Blyth, Lloyd Bochner, James Donald, Hugh Griffith	USA ABC Television Drama Black and white
<i>The Citadel</i> (Nine-episode series)	1960	John Frankau	Kenneth Hyde	Eric Lander, Zena Walker, Jack May, Noel Harrison	GB Associated-Rediffusion TV Drama 30 minutes Black and white
<i>Dr. Finlay's Casebook</i> (8 season, 191 episode series)	1962-1971	Distintos directores	Distintos guionistas	Bill Simpson, Andrew Cruickshank, Barbara Mullen,	GB BBC 50 minutes
<i>The Ordeal of Dr. Shannon</i> [Episode from the series "The DuPont Show of the Week" (1961)] (Adaptation of "Shannon's Way")	1962	Joan Kemp- Welch	Robert Stewart	Alan Casley, Madeleine Christie, Finlay Currie, Archie Duncan	USA Comedy Drama Musical
<i>The Ordeal of Dr. Shannon</i> [Episode from the series "ITV Television Playhouse" (1955)] (Adaptation of "Shannon's Way")	1963	Joan Kemp- Welch	Robert Stewart	Alan Casley, Madeleine Christie, Finlay Currie, Archie Duncan	USA Drama
<i>Memorandum van een dokter</i> (6-episode series) (Based on Dr. Finlay)	1963-1965	Peter Holland	Varios guionistas	Bram van der Vlugt, Rob Geraerds	Holland
<i>La Cittadella</i> (Miniseries)	1964	Anton Giulio Majano	Anton Giulio Majano	Alberto Lupo, A. Maria Guarnieri, Fosco Giachetti, E. Rossi Drago	Italy RAI Black and white

Table 2 (continued). TV adaptations of AJ Cronin's work

Título original	Año	Director	Guión	Protagonistas	Otros datos
<i>Novi asistent</i> (Film)	1964	Mirjana Samardzic	AJ Cronin	Dejan Dubajic, Ljiljana Jovanovic, Nikola Simic, Milan Srdoc	Yugoslavia Black and white
<i>O Jardineiro Espanhol</i> (Series)	1967	Fábio Sabag	Tatiana Belinsky	Ednei Giovenazzi, Osmano Cardoso, João José Pompeo	Brazil TV Tupi
<i>... e le stelle stanno a guardare</i> (Miniseries) (Adaptation of "The Stars Look Down")	1971	Anton Giulio Majano	Anton Giulio Majano	Orso Maria Guerrini, Andrea Checchi, Giancarlo Giannini	Italy RAI Black and white
<i>The Stars Look Down</i> (13-episode series)	1974	Roland Joffé Alan Grint	Alan Plater	Ian Hastings, Basil Dignam, Alun Armstrong, Avril Elgar	GB Granada Television Drama 60 minutes/episode
<i>Les Années d'illusion</i> (6-episode miniseries) (Adaptation of "The Valorous Years")	1977	Pierre Matteuzi	Christine Carrel	Yves Brainville, Josephine Chaplin, Michèle Amoudruz	France Switzerland TF1 Télévision Suisse-Romande 52 minutes/episode
<i>The Citadel</i> (10-episode series)	1983	Peter Jefferies, Mike Vardy	Don Shaw	Ben Cross, Clare Higgins, Gareth Thomas, Niall Buggy	GB BBC Drama Colour 50 minutes/episode
<i>Doctor Finlay</i> (27-episode miniseries)	1993-1996	Varios directores	Distintos autores	David Rintoul, Annette Crosbie, Ian Bannen	Scottish Television Enterprises Drama Colour 60 minutes/episode
<i>La Cittadella</i> (4-episode miniseries)	2003	Fabrizio Costa	Salvatore Basile	Massimo Ghini, Barbora Bobulová, Franco Castellano, Juraj Rasla	De Angelis Group,... Drama Colour 50 minutes/episode

## Coda

Discredited as a novelist by certain literary critics, the work of Archibald Joseph Cronin has nevertheless made a noticeable impact both on students or would-be students of medicine, and on film and television. These words are intended as a modest tribute to one whom, with controversial repercussion, managed to inspire as a writer-doctor and who was at

the same time the author of works on which the screenplays of unforgettable films were based.

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