

Beata Bigaj-Zwonek

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1316-375X>
Ignatianum University in Cracow
beata.bigaj@ignatianum.edu.pl

Izabela Kaczmarzyk

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7310-2209>
Ignatianum University in Cracow
izabela.kaczmarzyk@ignatianum.edu.pl

Monika Stankiewicz-Kopec

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1650-3887>
Ignatianum University in Cracow
monika.kopec@ignatianum.edu.pl
DOI: 10.35765/pk.2026.5201.02

Editorial

“No one knows the value of good health until it is lost,” wrote Jan Kochanowski, the most renowned Polish poet, centuries ago. There is something deeply symbolic in the fact that this well-known verse from the epigram *Na zdrowie* (*To Health*) has become a proverbial expression, frequently quoted and recalled not only by scholars and enthusiasts of Old Polish literature. This is hardly surprising, as health and illness belong to the most universal existential universal human experiences. For this reason, medical issues can be examined from many different perspectives, including though the lens of their interdependencies and cultural contexts. Medical knowledge, therapeutic standards, medications and treatments used, as well as the social role and position of medical professionals, are all elements of a cultural reality specific both to a given place and to a particular moment in history.

The authors of the articles included in the thematic section of this issue of *Perspectives on Culture* examine various cultural texts that reflect this medical journey through time. We invite readers to explore these contributions. The individual articles offer an interdisciplinary perspective on both historical and contemporary “medicine, physicians, and medicines,” highlighting several significant viewpoints and demonstrating that the cultural discourse surrounding these issues remains relevant today. Therefore, the organising principle of the section is not the chronology of the cultural texts analysed, but rather their thematic focus.

For this reason, we suggest that you begin your reading with the difficult and still largely taboo subject of cancer. Bogusława Bodzioch-Bryła addresses this issue in her article *Spectrality. Forms of Imaging Cancer in Contemporary Literature and Painting*, analysing narratives of illness present in the poetry

of Justyna Tomska, Sławomir Hornik, and Tadeusz Różewicz; in the prose of Mira Marcinów Bezmatek, and Małgorzata Lebda; in the reportage of Aneta Żukowska; and in the essay of Stefan Szymbutka. Adrianna Niżnik examines the consequences of metaphorising serious illnesses and the conscious use of specific metaphors in her article *Common Models of Illness Based on Susan Sontag's Essay "Illness as Metaphor."* Małgorzata Laskowska, in turn, analyses the issues of responsible communication on medical topics in her article *Ethical Aspects of 'Clickbait' in Health Communication: An Analysis of Headlines from news.google.com*, drawing attention to the role that clickbait currently plays as an important element of health information.

Another, more extensive group of texts is devoted to representations of those who stand on the front line of the fight against disease. The topics of these articles cover both the perspective of doctors practising in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their portrayal as literary characters, as well as studies of writers who were themselves physicians. The well-known nineteenth-century French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, associated with the Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital in Paris, is the subject of Renata Stachura-Lupa's article *Professor Charcot's Lessons. Polish Echoes – Gabriela Zapolska*, which examines the actress and writer's interest in research into mental and nervous disorders. Magdalena Sadlik, in her article "Practice ... Is Not an Easy Thing" – *Literary Portraits of Doctors in the Prose of Zofia Kowalewska and Zofia Kowerska*, discusses two largely forgotten novels: *Marzyciel (The Dreamer, 1896)* by Zofia Kowerska and *Z pamiętników doktora (From the Memoirs of a Physician, 1914)* by Zofia Kowalewska. Their protagonists are physicians who, in accordance with positivist ideals, take on the demanding challenge of "working at the grass-roots" in provincial areas during the period of the partitions.

Aneta Grodecka analyses literary works whose authors had medical training in her article entitled *Diagnosis of Mental Disorders in the Works of Writer-Doctors*. She discusses Anton Chekhov, Mikhail Bulgakov, Mieczysław Jarosławski, and Stanisław Lem, pointing out that although they used literary fiction, their works also constitute an important contribution to discussions on the nature of human consciousness and on the relationships between the psyche, the body, and the environment. The voice of the creator-patient is explored by Agnieszka Kazibut in her article *Pathography in the Rhythm of the Heart: Mikołaj Grynberg's "The Year I Didn't Die"* placing the interpretation of this text within the framework of contemporary medical humanities. The author emphasises the therapeutic power of literature and the existential significance of illness, which becomes one of the many narratives about life. Jolanta Kowal adopts a different perspective, focusing on the memoirs of physicians practicing in Vilnius in the first half of the nineteenth century. Her article *From the Perspective of Hippocrates' Students. Contributions to the Image of Literary and Cultural Life after the Partitions Based on the Memoirs of Józef*

Frank and Stanisław Morawski argues that combining medical knowledge and skills with sensitivity to art and literary talent enabled these physicians not only to inscribe themselves into the history of medicine in Vilnius, but above all to enrich our understanding of the literary and cultural life of old Lithuania in a way that remains valuable for contemporary researchers.

Other regions and periods are addressed in Dorota Szcześniak's article *Medicine in the Polish Provinces in the Interwar Period in the Memoirs of Zofia Karaś*, which is devoted to a determined physician from Sucha who fought tirelessly to improve the lives of her patients, while also capturing the image of the Beskid countryside in the interwar period. The image of physicians depicted in nineteenth-century dramas is examined by Anna Wypych-Gawrońska in her article *The Doctor in Drama: Literary Works and Their Reception in Nineteenth-Century Polish Theatre*.

The final two articles focus on the issue of traditional medicines. Beata Stuchlik-Surowiak's *In the Pharmacy and in the Kitchen: Vegetables and Spices with Medicinal Properties in "Skład albo skarbiec znakomitych sekretów ekonomiej ziemiańskiej"* by Jakub Kazimierz Haur (1632–1709) and Dorota Światała-Trybek's *Put Three Pieces of Charcoal in Water..., or the Place of Charcoal in Folk Medicine (An Outline of the Issue)* both address this topic. Beata Stuchlik-Surowiak analyses the work of Jakub Kazimierz Haur entitled *Skład albo skarbiec znakomitych sekretów ekonomiej ziemiańskiej (Composition or Treasury of Excellent Secrets of Land Management)*. In this 17th-century compendium, the author included a wide range of practical advice, combining rational knowledge with elements of magical thinking. Among other subjects, he addressed medical issues, describing the effects of herbal remedies prepared from vegetables and spices, which were also believed to help treat illnesses thought to result from witchcraft or spells. Dorota Światała-Trybek, drawing on ethnographic sources, outlines the medicinal properties of charcoal and coal in traditional folk medicine. She discusses their use in the so-called "coal test," associated with breaking spells, as well as their role as apotropaic objects and as tools in matters related to health.

