Tuberculosis and Its Presence in Music, Art and Film

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Tuberculosis is a disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, and for at least 9000 years, humans have been a host for this pathogen. Primarily affecting the lungs, the disease is characterized by prolonged coughing, hemoptysis, chest pains, weight loss, and fatigue among other symptoms. Because sufferers appear to be wasting away from within when afflicted with tuberculosis, this disease was also called consumption throughout history.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, tuberculosis was endemic in urban poor populations, causing the most widespread concern globally. Among these individuals, artists and musicians were also afflicted with tuberculosis or were related to someone that had been. Because of this, many songs, stories, and pieces of art were based around the suffering this disease brought, such as Puccini’s *La bohème*, *The Sick Child* by Edvard Munch, and Jimmie Rodgers' *T.B. Blues*. In present times, the film *Moulin Rouge!* also based its plot around this disease. Tuberculosis is an important part of the history of liberal arts, and to this day, one continues to find its presence in many artistic pieces.