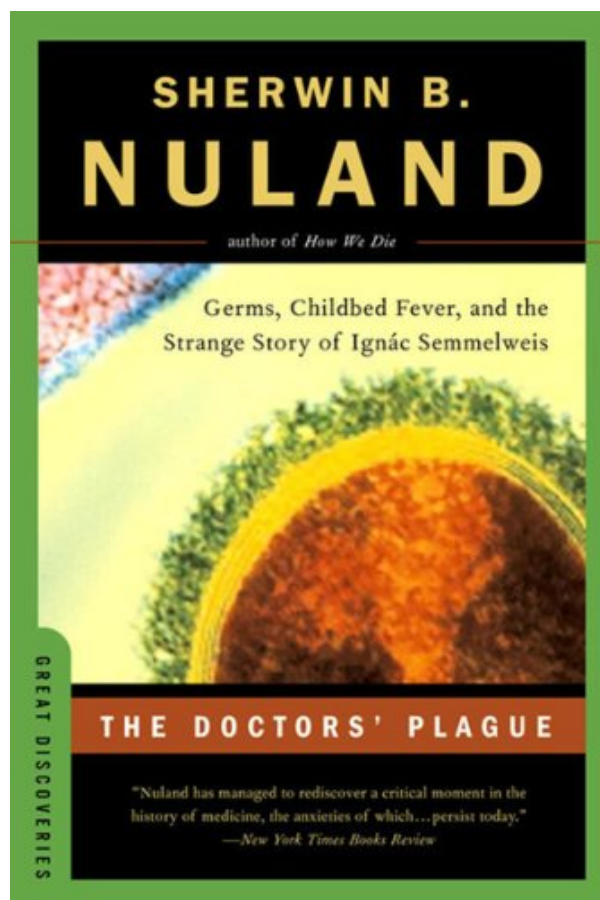
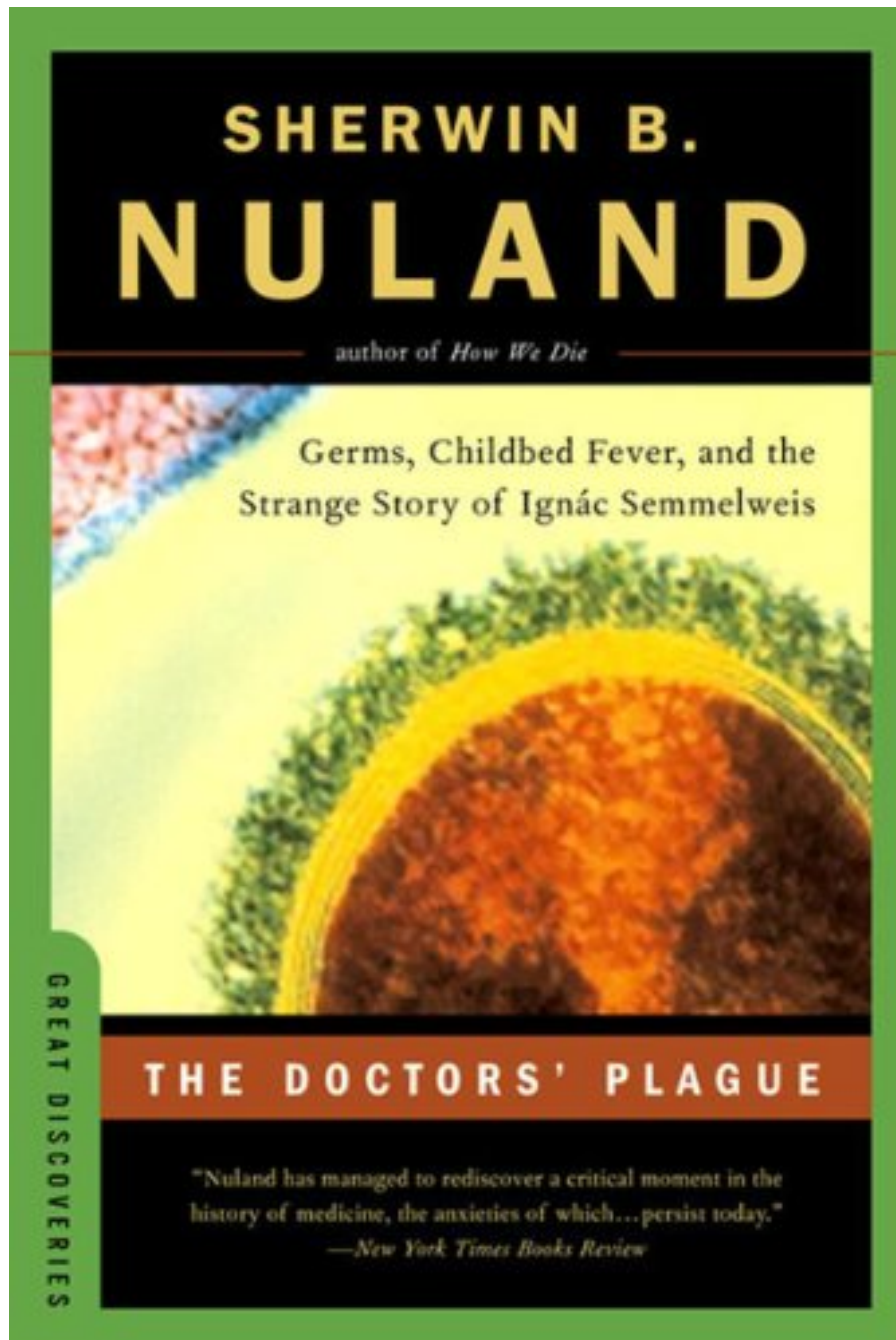


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STORY OF IGNAC SEMMELWEIS (GREAT
DISCOVERIES) BY SHERWIN B. NULAND**



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"Riveting" (Houston Chronicle), "captivating" (Discover), and "compulsively readable" (San Francisco Chronicle).

Surgeon, scholar, best-selling author, Sherwin B. Nuland tells the strange story of Ignác Semmelweis with urgency and the insight gained from his own studies and clinical experience. Ignác Semmelweis is remembered for the now-commonplace notion that doctors must wash their hands before examining patients. In mid-nineteenth-century Vienna, however, this was a subversive idea. With deaths from childbed fever exploding, Semmelweis discovered that doctors themselves were spreading the disease. While his simple reforms worked immediately—childbed fever in Vienna all but disappeared—they brought down upon Semmelweis the wrath of the establishment, and led to his tragic end.

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From Publishers Weekly

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The Curse of Character

By Kelly L. Norman

In a short, readable volume, Sherwin B. Nuland, M.D. has succeeded in telling the story of a brilliant man whose findings changed medical science completely, and might have helped those changes take place much earlier but for his inability to get along with his peers and elders.

True, the blame for childbed fever continuing at the Allgemeine Krankenhaus in Vienna where he worked and studied should not fall solely on Ignác Semmelweis' shoulders. Arrogance on the part of others, as well as politics and simple entrenched institutionalism put up barrier after barrier, ensuring that medical students would for years after continue delivering babies after handling cadavers (the practice which was the primary problem at that hospital, and probably countless others worldwide). Dr. Nuland explains this in a style friendly to lay readers but which pulls together interesting facts from history, the culture in which Semmelweis worked (including its attitude toward women and children), as well as the world of medicine. He also writes sensitively about a man who had the knowledge to save others nearly a half century before it is put to use, whose personal quirks and lack of respect for others played a part in the disregard of that knowledge.

Fascinating, enlightening, and highly recommended.

9 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

The Cry and the Covenant redux

By Peggy Vincent

Childbed fever (puerperal sepsis) was the scourge of pregnant women in the middle of the 19th century. Germs hadn't been discovered yet, and the idea of washing their hands between doing an autopsy and delivering a baby was anathema to physicians, who strongly resented the implication that they were in any way 'dirty,' or that they themselves were the cause of the deaths of between 20-50% of women under their care. Ignaz Semmelweis, an unknown Hungarian obstetrician, concluded that a procedure as simple as hand washing between patients could save nearly all of the women's lives.

He was reviled, sank into despair and depression, and died of self-inflicted puerperal bacteria days after being admitted to a madhouse.

Nuland's superb book updates a much older book on the same subject, The Cry and the Covenant. It documents beautifully an almost forgotten piece of medical history, as Semmelweis's discoveries were later eclipsed by Pasteur and Lister (who had the simple advantage of living after the discovery of the microscope and the acceptance of the Germ Theory). Don't miss it.

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