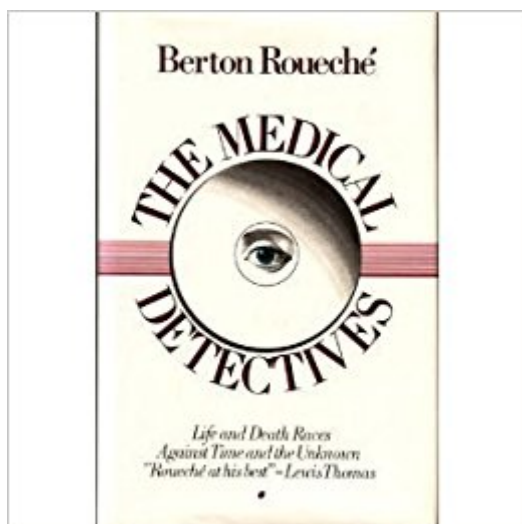


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# Medical Detectives



## Synopsis

The classic collection of award-winning medical investigative reporting What do Lyme disease in Long Island, a pig from New Jersey, and an amateur pianist have in common? All are subjects in three of 24 utterly fascinating tales of strange illnesses, rare diseases, poisons, and parasites—each tale a thriller of medical suspense by the incomparable Berton Roueché. The best of his New Yorker articles are collected here to astound readers with intriguing tales of epidemics in America's small towns, threats of contagion in our biggest cities, even bubonic plague in a peaceful urban park. In each true story, local health authorities and epidemiologists race against time to find the clue to an unknown and possibly fatal disease. Sometimes a life hangs in the balance, and the culprit may be as innocuous as a bowl of oatmeal. Award-winning journalist Berton Roueché is unfailingly exact, informative, and able to keep anyone reading till dawn. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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## Customer Reviews

"Berton Roueché's Annals of Medicine pieces enriched us for well over a quarter of a century. They have become classics in a genre he himself created single-handedly. The American Academy and Institute of Arts & Letters' Roueché's writings have become unofficial textbooks for medical students, interns, practitioners, scientists, and for that matter anyone interested in human illness.

They are engrossing, instructive, accurate, and marvelous fun to read, and the present collection represents Roueché at his best. —Lewis Thomas, MD, author of *The Lives of a Cell* and *The Medusa and the Snail* —This text refers to the Paperback edition.

10 1.5-hour cassettes —This text refers to the Paperback edition.

These short accounts of medical mysteries are like potato chips. You can't find you can't read just one. You finish the account of the young man who was infected with a schistosomiasis-causing worm while swimming in the Nile - then you just have to go on to see what "The Orange Man" and "The Dead Mosquitoes" are about. There's a wide-ranging wealth of information here about people who manifested unusual, hard-to-diagnose symptoms, but whose problems were eventually pinned down and solved. Since most of these conditions are rare, you might not experience the problems themselves but then again, you might. In which case, you can be an informed participant in helping your doctor reach a diagnosis. You won't be put in the position of the woman who was repeatedly diagnosed by Freudian psychiatrists with having a passive/aggressive, attention-seeking antagonism toward her husband when in fact she had Wilson's disease, a genetic condition that causes a person to accumulate copper in various organs. The one drawback to these essays is the fact that some of them might be a bit outdated. They were written from the late 1940s to the late 1980s. While it's amazing how currently applicable most of the information still is, there are a few exceptions. For example, Roueché wrote at a time when there was no specific vaccine for any type of hepatitis. That isn't true any longer regarding hepatitis types A and B. Another feature of this writing that I initially thought might be a negative is Roueché's tendency to track the details of each investigation in time and place. He will report that he called Dr. X at 12:15 on March 3, then proceeded to his office at 123 X Place and arrived at 12:45. For a moment I was irritated at this level of what seemed irrelevant detail about activities that took place decades ago. But then I got in the spirit of this approach. It reminded me of the style of the old "Dragnet" TV show. These details serve to pace the reader through each case, to get the feel of actually following along in the detectives' footsteps as they track these very interesting medical malefactors to their sources.

Gentle, lovely, scary. An acquired taste for readers who later grew into gobblers of blood, gore, and zombies. When a Berton Roueche medical investigation appeared in *The New Yorker* of old, it was an event. Roueche was the fore-runner to at least twenty very fine writers now doing the same thing: breaking into the genetic vault to try to understand how we catch diseases, what we can do about not catching them, and learning how to recognize them. These narratives read today seem comfortable and natural, as indeed they were on publication. Roueche may have been one of the earlier writers to find and identify and stick to a niche. As friends in Easthampton in the 60s, there was nothing eerie or Charles Addams-ish about Berton or his lovely wife Kay. But they were quietly and seriously curious about medicine and could go underground for lengthy periods of time to scope out what they might have suspected. And we, as readers, were nine times out of ten fascinated by what had been unearthed. This, readers, is a "source" of much that followed that has proven not only gripping but also seminal. It's a treat. John Neufeld, author of *Lisa, Bright and Dark* (Kindle) and *Edgar Allan* (also Kindle-d)

If you enjoy figuring out the disease based on the sequential appearance of symptoms, be aware that herein lie spoilers. It's a collection of 25 essays first published mostly in the 1950s and 1960s culled from the pages of *The New Yorker*. Each is written in plain language and accessible to the non-specialist and to lay people who aren't busy watching "World's Wildest Police Videos." Roueche was a good writer -- good in the sense of putting down clear prose and good in the sense of packing it with suspense. Here's his opening to one of the chapters, "A Man Named Hoffman." "Around ten o'clock in the morning of Wednesday, March 4, 1964, a man named Donald Hoffman presented himself for treatment at the Student Health Clinic of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, some thirty miles northwest of Cincinnati. Hoffman was thirty-six years old, married, and a resident of Cincinnati, but, as he explained to the receptionist, he was currently employed as an insulation installer, in Oxford . . . and his company had an arrangement with the clinic. He was here, he added, because the foreman had sent him. That was the only reason. His trouble was nothing -- an itchy sore on the side of his neck. He had probably picked up a sliver of glass-wool fiber. It had happened several times before. It was a common complaint in his trade." First, note the precision of the presentation and the detail Roueche gives us. We even know the time of day that Hoffman showed up at the clinic. This is authoritative stuff. It sounds like *The Voice of God* narrators in one of those post-war docudramas about Nazis and gangsters that were paeans to J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI. Or maybe "Dragnet." "It was four o'clock in the afternoon, Wednesday, March 4th. We were working the bunko squad out of Littering. It was hot in Los Angeles." Second, okay, the poor guy has an itchy

sore on his neck, maybe from glass-wool fiber, right? Wrong. After a lengthy examination of Hoffman, his place of work, the materials he schleps around, it turns out that he has ANTHRAX -- a rare disease of goats! Most of the chapters are rather like detective stories. The patient presents with symptoms that are only slightly odd but turn out to be much odder than they seem. I read some of the later stories when they first appeared in The New Yorker and was enthralled, informed, and sometimes amused by them. My favorite is "The Orange Man." The patient shows up at his family doctor's office and is a bright pumpkin-orange -- but he doesn't realize it. His complaint is a stomach ache! His wife has never noticed the change either. Further, there is no disorder that turns the skin a bright orange. (The man, as it develops, has two simultaneous disorders, one that turns you red and one that turns you yellow.) It's an enjoyable and educational collection. And let me put it this way. If you like Agatha Christie, you ought to like "The Medical Detectives."

Great price, good quality and received almost immediately! I would definitely buy from this seller again!

Some of these essays are dated. Others are timeless. He is a good writer.

An excellent book, and a good read.

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