manic depressive psychosis or bipolar disorder. Jangfeldt surmises syphilis and attempted suicide as possible causes on no evidence.

Munthe had an extraordinary attraction to women: many of his patients were clearly in love with him; they included the Crown Princess Victoria, Lady Ottoline Morrell and the future Mrs Bernard Shaw. This prompts Jangfeldt to imply without any justification a sexual relationship, and the blurb states (no doubt to sell the book) that 'he [Munthe] became the lover of the Crown Princess Victoria'. He ignores the possibility that Munthe might have adhered to the moral tradition of the Hippocratic oath that doctors should not indulge in sexual relations with their patients. What might have been an academic study of an extraordinary human being is spoilt here and elsewhere by speculation and innuendo.

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literature and medicine

Literary portrayals of deafness

This column explores the links and synergies between medicine and literature. What roles can literature play in reflecting and influencing good practice, and what sorts of images of doctoring are to be found in drama, poetry, fiction, biography, electronic fora and film? The editors would be pleased to receive short papers, ranging from 500–1,000 words, on relevant topics. Those interested in contributing should email brian.hurwitz@kcl.ac.uk or neil.vickers@kcl.ac.uk

Nearly 300 years ago, Daniel Defoe wrote a remarkable book concerning a deaf and dumb boy, the epnonymous Duncan Campbell, whose life and attainments came to the notice of a fashionable society intrigued by novelty.[1] Based on the exploits of a real person, the account records Campbell's rise to fame, his considerable ability in communicating through finger signing, and the belief that he had been divinely endowed with special powers compensating for the loss of the natural gift of hearing.

The life and adventures of Mr Duncan Campbell is a documentary fiction which offers the first example of a deaf character portrayed in an English novel. And here lies the rub. Rather than a study of the condition of deafness, the majority of this extremely sympathetic work deals with what is perceived to be Campbell's supernatural capacity to predict the future, especially for young ladies in search of a wealthy husband. Why, then, does the author make the main character a boy with profound sensory loss, only to frame the discourse in terms of sensationalism and theology?

Defoe's interest was no doubt prompted and informed by his brother-in-law, Dr Wallis, who had developed a method of educating deaf people and had started to systematise the emerging finger signing, some of which is retained in present day British Sign Language (BSL).[2] Defoe, it has been suggested, also enjoyed writing about 'outsiders',[3] and a young man in 18th century England with profound hearing loss would certainly have experienced misunderstanding and marginalisation. In the novel, Duncan's role, in creating a pattern to be copied by future authors, seems to be mainly that of a focus around which the plot and philosophical arguments are allowed to develop, and a metaphorical 'sounding board' against which are revealed the qualities, foibles, reactions and attitudes of the more 'normal' hearing characters.

This intriguing example is the first of a series of deaf characters that tell us perhaps more about the perceptions of the hearing authors who create them than the reality of people living with deafness. In researching novelistic portrayals of the non-hearing, I have discovered a relatively small but notable number. Dickens wrote at least six deaf characters into his narratives, including that of Sophy in *Dr Marigold*, the most frequently quoted example of any author.[4] It is a beautifully drawn pen portrait of a young golden-haired girl adopted from a life of abuse by an itinerant trader. The tinker, known as Dr Marigold, teaches Sophy to read and write so that they can communicate, and recognising her obvious intelligence, wants her to achieve a greater measure of success than himself, prompting him to enrol her at the deaf and dumb school in London. This is Dickens at his sentimental best, as he describes the transformation of a misused and misunderstood treasure of a girl into a shining example of the benefits of tolerance, paternal affection and appropriate education.

Eleven years earlier, Dickens's great friend, Wilkie Collins, had written about a similar deaf character, Madonna, who had also been rescued from ill-treatment and educated at the same school.[5] Both

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authors were familiar with the Old Kent Road teaching establishment in London accommodating several hundred children and Dickens had been heavily influenced by his visits to a strikingly intelligent deaf girl while travelling in America.[6] There is evidence that they tried to make their portrayals as realistic as possible,[7] but both Sophy and Madonna are types of the vulnerable and angelic protected by the generous and more ordinary hearing characters. Comparatively minor roles described by Dickens, such as Wardle's mother[8] and Wemmick's father,[9] reflect the warm and comfortable experience of elderly relatives that many readers would have recognised, devices that help establish a homely, humorous atmosphere in the story, who show the filial devotion of their hearing and more major fictional counterparts.

These well-intended and sympathetic representations of deafness, written from the perspective of hearing authors, contrast markedly with the experiences recorded by people who themselves are non-hearing. Two forms of non-fictional deaf narrative have been described, diverging mainly as a consequence of the primary form of communication used by the individual, and the sense of identity that this engenders.[10] These factors are in turn largely dependent upon whether the deafness is congenital or early, or develops later in life, leading to the acquisition of either English or BSL as the first language. This delineation in communication is thus one of the principal keys to understanding the non-hearing individual's sense of identity as perceiving themselves belonging to, and wanting to integrate with, the hearing and English-speaking majority, or the BSL-based minority subculture. Allied to this is the former and majority group's belief, coincident with the hearing population, that deafness is marked by loss, a diseased state needing medical intervention, contrasting with the radically opposed perspective of the primarily BSL-based group, interpreting deafness according to the cultural model of a minority language. The resulting sociological distinction has led to the two communities being commonly designated as 'deaf' and 'Deaf' respectively.[11]

There are remarkably few characters in mainstream novels that are representative of the smaller, but comparatively more excluded and exclusive Deaf group. This is at least in part because of the trend in 19th century education of the non-hearing to focus entirely on the merits of oral communication, with BSL viewed as an inferior and immoral alternative, relegated, at best, to private and, at worst, to subversive use only. A comparatively recent, and probably the best example, is that of the young murdered girl in Elizabeth George's *For the sake of Elena*.[12] The novel places the non-hearing character in the middle of a struggle between the conflicting demands of the Deaf and hearing worlds. Issues of identity, communication, community, acceptance and access are very well described. Controversial themes that remain current and active within the Deaf community are explored with understanding and sympathy.

Although one in eight people in the UK experience hearing loss,[13] the portrayal of the deafened in any form of media is strikingly uncommon. The vast majority develop deafness later in life and are often remedied, at least partially, by the prescription of hearing aids. But how often do we read of characters fiddling with their appliances, changing batteries or de-waxing the plastic tubes? There remains the much smaller community whose culture, interests and allegiance remain firmly within the Deaf world, but again are rarely depicted as individuals unable adequately to communicate with the hearing majority who are contentedly fluent in BSL. This begs the question as to why authors include non-hearing characters at all. Rather than being used only as catalysts to the plot or to simply reflect the qualities and attitudes of their co-existent hearing colleagues, deaf and Deaf characters could, and should, be interesting and useful additions to the author's creative possibilities as representative individuals in their own right.[14]

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