Educating and Entertaining Since 1948: An Historical Look at the Comic Strip *Rex Morgan, M.D.*

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**BACKGROUND**

- First published in 1948 by psychiatrist creator, Nicholas P. Dallis, and is still in print today.
- *Rex Morgan, M.D.* is published in over 300 newspapers around the world, including 14 different countries, with an estimated readership of over 30 million people.
- The strip is known for its contemporary medical stories woven into dramatic plots with strong human ethos.
- Previous to *Rex Morgan, M.D.*, medical comics were focused on telling stories of medical discovery and heroism from history to regain the public's interest in the field of medicine.
- Dallis' main focus as the creator was to tell a story of the human essence, but also bring medical education to the general public.
- As a physician, Dallis garnered tremendous respect and recognition from both the comic and medical community.

**METHODS**

- King Features Syndicate provided a near comprehensive archive of published strips, which were analyzed for plot development and medical themes.
- Current creator, Woody Wilson, provided interviews as well as Dr. Dallis' collection of correspondence letters, including letters to and from readers.
- Dr. Dallis' documents were photographed, and organized via date, type of correspondence, people involved, and the general matter of the communication.
- Bert Hansen's research on the history of medical comics as well as other secondary sources were used to provide a framework for *RMMD*.

**LETTERS FROM READERS**

- 1975: A letter of encouragement from an avid reader, supporting the marriage of Rex to his nurse, June.
- 1972: A letter from an “Observant R.N.” correcting the improper illustration of a sting.
- Date Unknown: Patient recovering from a mastectomy writes to keep up her dexterity.

All letters are courtesy of Woody Wilson. Dr. Dallis' wife gave Wilson all of Dallis' old files after his passing in 1991.

**CONCLUSIONS**

- The primary objective of *Rex Morgan, M.D.* was to tell a story about the human ethos.
- Even though the medical information was secondary to character development, Dallis received several awards from medical associations for his achievement in providing excellent education and illustration of the medical profession.
- Dallis wrote about contemporary medical issues, often by request of physicians or public health experts.
- Readers wrote letters to Dr. Dallis almost twice as often about the characters' personal life compared to the medical issues presented within the stories.
- While under Dallis' creativity, the plots were nearly formulaic in the character presentation, Rex's involvement and his heroic resolution of the cases.

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