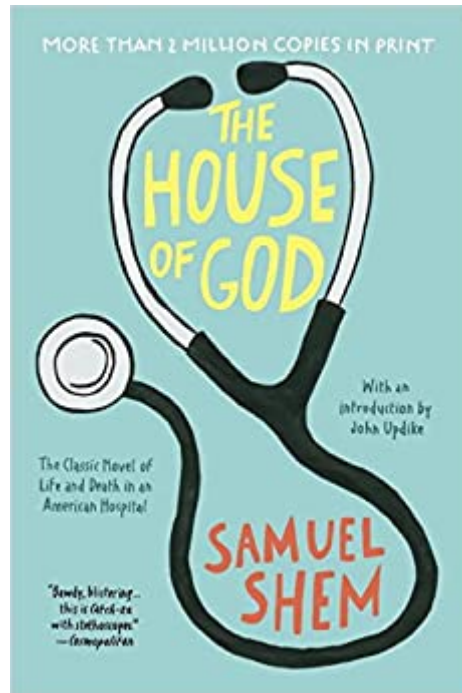




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# The House Of God



## Synopsis

By turns heartbreaking, hilarious, and utterly human, *The House of God* is a mesmerizing and provocative novel about Roy Basch and five of his fellow interns at the most renowned teaching hospital in the country. Struggling with grueling hours and sudden life-and-death responsibilities, Basch and his colleagues, under the leadership of their rule-breaking senior resident known only as the Fat Man, must learn not only how to be fine doctors but, eventually, good human beings. A phenomenon ever since it was published, *The House of God* was the first unvarnished, unglorified, and uncensored portrait of what training to become a doctor is truly like, in all its terror, exhaustion and black comedy. With more than two million copies sold worldwide, it has been hailed as one of the most important medical novels ever written. With an introduction by John Updike

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“The raunchy, troubling, and hilarious novel that turned into a cult phenomenon.

Singularly compelling|brutally honest.” •The New York

Times“Bawdy, blistering|this is *Catch-22* with

stethoscopes.” •Cosmopolitan“Wonderfully wild, ribald, erotic, bitter,

compassionate|in the same spirit as *Catch-22*.” •The Seattle

Times“A wildly funny, sad, laugh-out-loud, frightening, outrageous, thought-provoking,

moving book|a story of modern medicine rarely, if ever, told.” •The Houston

Chronicle“Does for the practice of medicine what *Catch-22* and *M\*A\*S\*H* did for the practice

of warfare.” •The Newark Star-Ledger“Mordantly funny, brilliantly

ironic. A writer of outstanding substance and style. Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"Brilliant !" -- Chicago Tribune. "Bawdy blistering... this is Catch-22 with stethoscopes."

--Cosmopolitan. Now a classic! The hilarious novel of the healing arts that reveals everything your doctor never wanted you to know. Six eager interns -- they saw themselves as modern saviors-to-be. they came from the top of their medical school class to the bottom of the hospital staff to serve a year in the time-honored tradition, racing to answer the flash of on-duty call lights and nubile nurses. But only the Fat Man --the calm, all-knowing resident -- could sustain them in their struggle to survive, to stay sane, to love-and even to be doctors when their harrowing year was done. "Does for the practice of medicine what Catch-22 and M\*A \*S \*H did for the practice of warfare." -- The Newark Star-Ledger "Wildly funny... frightening... outrageous, moving... a story of modern medicine rarely, if, ever told." -- The Houston Chronicle --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read this book back in the late 70's and read it again only recently. I was curious to see two things : how much of the book I remembered correctly and how much the descriptions of that world were dated. I remember many silly details and had forgotten some major things and characters. In my mind the Fat Man figured much more prominently than he does. I guess I had built him up as sort of a Yoda figure over the years. Still, Fats remains perhaps my favorite character. Some of the medical procedures thankfully are no longer practice with the kind of frequency encountered in the book. Still it is amazing to me how much of the book deals with the same sort of conundrums the health care delivery systems do today. I'm not sure how someone who has never worked in an ER or ICU of a large teaching hospital can relate to the story, but I assure you that health care providers at that time were quite taken with the book. It provided a much needed recognition for the kind of soul sucking, energy draining, and morally bankrupt situations we were placed in on a daily basis. It has been compared to Catch 22 and I think that is probably fair though the two books come from different worlds. In both worlds, however, there are survivors and casualties and the House of God probably helped some to survive by the simple fact that misery loves company and company is therapeutic. This book was therapeutic for a past generation of house staff at all levels and disciplines. Upon revisiting it, I suspect it still provides some validation to the current one as well.

I tell people, "Hey, you should read House of God" and they're like, "meh". I tell them, "Half the book

is hard-core sex. And they're like, "What? Let me see that book.... hey, half this book is hard-core sex!" And it is. The novelty (pun intended) aside, I love this book for being utterly honest. Even if some aspects of work in the hospital are exaggerated, they exist nonetheless and I would say it's actually pretty accurate. In my short time as a student, I have observed at least half of the terrible coping mechanisms detailed in this book.... now that I know what I'm looking at. Some say this book is offensive, some say it's depressing, and some say it's hilarious. I say it's all of those things. Just like life as a medical resident.

This book was heartily recommended by my gastroenterologist. Even though it came out in 1978, when I went to get it out of the library, it was out, and there were 5 people ahead of me on line to read it! So I got it from , and am almost finished with it. It's plenty dark in places, but also quite fascinating, with a quirky group of characters.... I'm enjoying it immensely.

There are books - good books! - that are written by putting what's in an author's brain, in a fairly formulaic manner that seems at times, a little forced. Books that are written to be read; easy, digestible prose in unoffensive and perfunctory doses. And then there are books that seem to have been inspired by a muse that sits on the shoulder that the author channels into paper. This book is one of the latter category. *The House of God* is a book written, as the author would put it, from deep within the author's cardiac muscles and hits you straight in the sigmoid colon. Many have compared the book to *Catch-22*, and they are right to do so. Both are about people essential, much respected professions, the impossibility of their lives and the cynical ways they cope with the pressures of their occupation. Both are also, about redemption, growth, and love. Both had me laugh uncontrollably and sometimes shed a tear, and both are a must read for any person that believes that humanity is the most hideous and terrible infliction that has been borne upon the universe and at the same time, the most exalted. I don't use the term "love" on inanimate objects often, but I loved this book. So a quick synopsis - but you will find many of them already everywhere: Dr. Roy Basch, a new intern fresh off the BMS ("Best Medical School" - a thinly veiled reference to Harvard Medical) is off to intern at the "House of God" (again, a thinly veiled reference to Beth Israel). Eager and naive at first he quickly realizes that hospital patients fall into two broad categories: Gomers - elderly patients that refuse to die and are kept alive for monetary purposes (HOUSE LAW NO 1: GOMERS DON'T DIE) and the dying young: younger patients who have their whole lives ahead of them that unexpectedly contract something horrible and die. There to guide him through the conflicts and dilemmas of medical practice (and occasionally non-practice and mal-practice) is the book's unexpected hero:

The Fat Man. Some would call him an anti-hero, a combination of a cynic and a humanitarian, The Fat Man has a very Dr. House air about him and is certainly one of my favorite characters of all time. The theme of the book is the conflict between death and life, love and hate: it is dotted with a variety of sexual exploits, where Dr. Basch and some of his friends escape to to avoid thinking about death, constantly. Raunchy in their depiction, they contrast the constant stench of people dying with the interns' attempt at living. All in all - the book deserves a place of honor in my book case. I only hope that the authors' other work is as sublime; Catch-22 was a one off in Heller's work. I am eager to find out if this is a one-off in Shem's.

My son was entering his surgical residency after medical school and purchased this book. I read it, too, and enjoyed it immensely. Though told with a wicked sense of humor that will make you laugh aloud, the novel's portrayal of a resident's first year is quite accurate (except I have to say as a mother I hope my son isn't engaging in quite as much extracurricular activity with the nurses). Every American should have to read this book; they'd have much greater respect for the men and women who save their lives daily in hospitals and clinics across the country. The grueling pace and emotional drain they endure in residency is beyond imagining. Great book!

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