



Leech (Reaktion Books - Animal)

Robert G. W. Kirk, Neil Pemberton

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Armed with razor-sharp teeth and capable of drinking many times its volume of blood, the leech is an unlikely cure for ill health. Yet that is exactly the role this worm-like parasite has played in both Western and Eastern medicine throughout history.

In this book, Robert G. W. Kirk and Neil Pemberton explore how the leech surfaces in radically different spheres. The ancients used them in humeral medicine to bring the four humors of the body—blood, phlegm, and black and yellow bile—back into balance. Today, leeches are used in plastic and reconstructive surgery to help reattach severed limbs and remove pools of blood before it kills tissue. Leeches have also been used in a nineteenth-century meteorological barometer and a twentieth-century biomedical tool that helped win a Nobel Prize. Kirk and Pemberton also reveal the dark side of leeches as they are portrayed in fiction, film, and popular culture. From Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to a video game player's nemesis, the leech is used to represent the fears of science run amok. *Leech* shines new light on one of humanity's most enduring and unlikely companions.

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