

THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

**LEWIS  
THOMAS  
PRIZE**

2019 PRIZE RECIPIENT

**SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE**

MONDAY, APRIL 22, 2019

Siddhartha Mukherjee's impulse for taming vast and daunting subjects has powered his career as an oncologist, a scientist, and a writer. His activities synergize and allow Dr. Mukherjee to rise to the highest levels of inspiration and effectiveness in all three arenas.

Born and raised in New Delhi, India, Dr. Mukherjee first encountered his lifelong interest at age nine, when a cousin with neck and mouth cancer visited his family home. At dinner, she did not open her mouth, and young Dr. Mukherjee was horrified to realize that she felt like her disfigurement was a visual burden on the world. This event and her subsequent death seeded in him an instinctive draw toward cancer.

He earned his undergraduate degree at Stanford University and then attended the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. After finishing his D.Phil. there, he went to Harvard Medical School, where he decided to specialize in oncology. He is now on the faculty of Columbia University, where he practices medicine and conducts research that may lead toward better treatments not only for cancers of the blood, but also for osteoporosis and osteoarthritis.

Prompted by the realization that no comprehensive history of cancer existed, he decided to write one. The product of this enterprise, *The Emperor of All Maladies*, takes the reader through the twists and turns of the 4000-year journey that we are still undergoing with this disease. It covers the topic from numerous vantage points, including hospital rooms, research laboratories, magazine articles, and the White House, focusing on individual people's struggles and crusades. The book won the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction.

Dr. Mukherjee subsequently wrote *The Laws of Medicine* and *The Gene: An Intimate History*. His thought-provoking essays in *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* brim with information, insight, and intimacy.

WELCOME

**RICHARD P. LIFTON, M.D., PH.D.**

President and Carson Family Professor  
The Rockefeller University

PRESENTATION OF THE

**2019 ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY**

**LEWIS THOMAS PRIZE**

**FOR WRITING ABOUT SCIENCE**

TO

**SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE, M.D., D.PHIL.**

PROGRAM

**Writing, Medicine, and Testimony:  
A Scientist as a Humanist**

SELECTED READING BY

DR. MUKHERJEE

FOLLOWED BY

A CONVERSATION WITH

**THOMAS P. SAKMAR, M.D.**

Richard M. and Isabel P. Furlaud Professor  
The Rockefeller University

*"We must rely on scientists to help us find the way through the near distance, but for the longer stretch of the future we are dependent on the poets. A poet is, after all, a sort of scientist, but engaged in a qualitative science in which nothing is measurable. He lives with data that cannot be numbered, and his experiments can be done only once."*

– Lewis Thomas, "A Trip Abroad"

Throughout history, scientists and writers have sought to communicate with one another, despite barriers of language and process. The Rockefeller University **Lewis Thomas Prize for Writing about Science** honors the rare individual who bridges both worlds—whose voice and vision can tell us about science's aesthetic and philosophical dimensions, providing not merely new information but cause for reflection, even revelation. The Lewis Thomas Prize was established in 1993 by the trustees of The Rockefeller University to honor the scientist as poet. The award was then presented to Lewis Thomas, its first recipient, that year.

Elected to the prestigious National Academy of Sciences in 1972, Lewis Thomas combined an active medical practice, teaching, and administration with a successful literary career. As a medical student at Harvard University, Dr. Thomas displayed literary ambition and published several poems. In 1971, he began contributing a regular column, "Notes of a Biology Watcher," to the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Some of these elegant essays were published as Dr. Thomas's first collection, *The Lives of a Cell* (1974), winner of the National Book Award. Dr. Thomas served as dean of the medical schools of Yale University and New York University, and ended his long career at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where he was president from 1973 to 1980, chancellor from 1980 to 1983, and president emeritus until his death at the age of 80 in 1993.