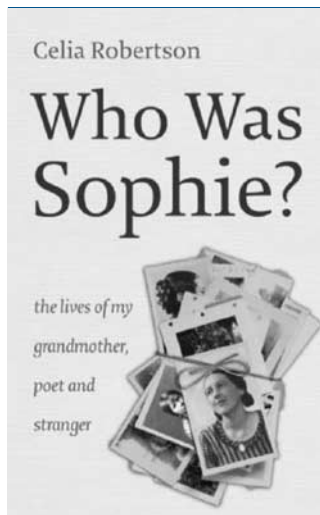


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**Who Was Sophie?
The Lives of my
Grandmother, Poet
and Stranger**

By Celia Robertson.
Virago. 2008. £12.00 (hb). 320pp.
ISBN: 9781844081899

Clinical case studies are practically extinct as a means of exploring and understanding psychiatric phenomena, despite the fact that they have served medicine and psychiatry well. From the case of Phineas Gage onwards, medicine has benefited from the careful study of single or small series of cases. Ironically, as the medical and psychiatric literatures have moved away from case studies, novelists and writers have embraced the form and put it to good use. In recent times, extended fictional and biographical accounts of psychopathology have included McGrath's *Spider*, McEwan's *Enduring Love* and Loudon's *Relative Strangers*. These accounts have succeeded in inviting the interested reader into the world that psychiatrists inhabit on a daily basis by bringing to life the abnormal experiences that we in psychiatry are familiar with, and rendering these understandable and meaningful as far as is possible.

Celia Robertson's book is in this tradition. It is about her grandmother, a poet who knew Virginia and Leonard Woolf and who maintained correspondence with Naomi Mitchison for many years. Robertson set out to paint a portrait of her grandmother; in the process she discovered the several lives she led and has written a masterly biography. Using letters, notebooks and the poetry of her grandmother, Joan Adeney Easdale (aka Sophie), Robertson has created a story that is both compelling and tragic, yet also inspiring and unforgettable.

The book is of interest to psychiatrists because it is a detailed exploration of the early development, adolescence and adult life of an individual who developed a psychosis later in life and whose conventional social life subsequently unravelled. The psychosis and its manifold impact are carefully described. There are instructive anecdotes that teach, more than any textbook can, how psychosis operates and how it may eventually sour relationships:

One night, when Jim was away on a work trip, she came tearing into the children's rooms and gathered them all into her bed. Gripping them tightly to her beneath the covers, she whispered, 'Shh, shhhh, we have to be quiet. There's someone in the roof, they're moving about taking photos. Lie on this side so they can't see you!' (p. 167)

One of Sandy's rare memories is of his mother calling him into the sitting room to agree that Jesus Christ was in the room. Standing there, wanting to be helpful, all he could see were the blue swirls of

the Persian rug. He felt desperately awkward but eventually said yes, he could see him, because there were slants of light coming in through the blinds and catching on the dust in the air. Maybe that was Jesus (p. 164).

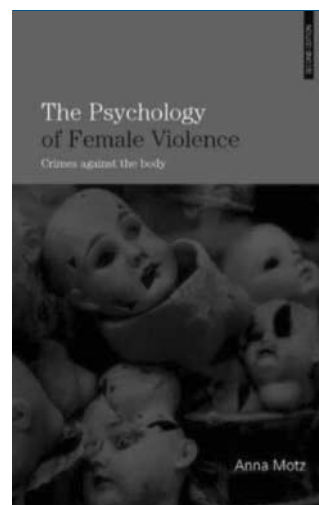
If you have a mother who you love deeply and who you feel is very special and she changes and goes away and is never the same again and yet has the same voice after all those years it's very difficult to deal with the sense of constant bereavement and distress (p. 207)

Descriptions of incredible acts of generosity and kindness by strangers – a lawyer, a social worker, drinking companions – are included. These individuals reaffirm one's faith that a sense of community still exists and that kindness is its currency. Furthermore, in spite of the corrosive power of psychosis on family life, this is a story of the resilience of family ties and the triumph of filial love over adversity.

Robertson has brought her grandmother back to life for our benefit. The account is truthful and unsentimental. Sophie's portrait is drawn with warmth and affection. It is an intimate study of how a troubled spirit can still function sufficiently to live a life, albeit disorganised, that is worthy of our attention. Finally, it reminds us of the real person suffering within the turmoil of psychosis and that they, in Kant's terms, have intrinsic value and dignity and continue to deserve our concern.

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**The Psychology of Female
Violence: Crimes against
the Body**

By Anna Motz. Routledge.
2008. £19.99 (hb).
ISBN: 9780415403870

The public typically focuses more on the men than the women who are involved in the criminal justice system, and popular interest in female criminality often emerges only after sensationalised crimes such as that of Rosemary West. But recent spikes in female arrests and incarceration rates, particularly in young women, are forcing us to take a critical look at the causes and consequences of female criminality and, especially, female violence.

Destruction, both for oneself and others, can indeed become an aim, even a dominant one, but only through perversion, recombination and narrowing of natural desires. The raw materials for this process are naturally passing hostilities towards others. In the first three parts of her book, Motz effectively and compellingly explores women's violence against their children, their selves and others. With absorbing case illustrations and well-judged reference to the literature, the perversion of women's