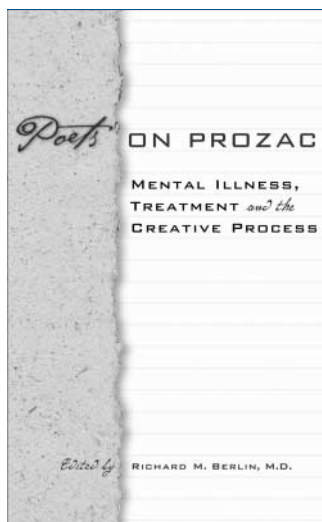


events. Susie Kilshaw, a social anthropologist, has observed and interviewed veterans at meetings, in their homes and when they attended clinics for investigation. This original research has given her a particular insight into the culture of Gulf War syndrome. She concludes that beliefs about ill health are related to narratives about the permeability of bodily boundaries, lost masculinity and ambivalence towards military culture. Medical dialogues, therefore, are rarely solely about medical matters but serve as a proxy for feelings about the self and the way that an individual relates to others. Indeed, the inclusion of transcripts of interviews and discussions is of particular value.

My only criticism of this book is that some of the arguments are repeated across chapters. Careful editing could have made the text more concise. Nevertheless, Dr Kilshaw has written a brave book that challenges popular assumptions about Gulf War syndrome; her analysis of the long-term effects of military service will serve as an important record not only for those with an interest in the armed forces, but also for researchers in the field of illness perception.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.109.068171



**Poets on Prozac:
Mental Illness,
Treatment and the
Creative Process**

Edited by Richard M. Berlin.
The Johns Hopkins University Press.
2008.
US\$21.95 (hb). 200pp.
ISBN: 9780801888397

Memoirs by writers who have experienced mental illness continue to have considerable importance within wider society. One of the first books of this kind was John Perceval's *A Narrative of the Treatment Experienced by a Gentleman during a Period of Mental Derangement* that was published in 1840. It was a campaigning text describing both the nature of mental illness and the poor quality of care for the mentally ill. Since then there have been other accounts by Daniel Schreber, William Seabrook, William Styron, Kay Redfield Jamison, Tim Lott, Fiona Shaw and others. The emotional force of these accounts works by the intimate detail of the process of mental disturbance. This new edited book is a collection of essays by 16 poets of whom Gwyneth Lewis is likely to be the only poet well known to the British audience. These poets describe their experiences of mental illness, mostly depression or bipolar disorder, of treatment and psychiatrists/psychotherapists, and the effect of treatment on the creative process. It is a welcome addition to this genre of writing.

The book is worth reading if only for Ren Powell's contribution, 'My name is not Alice'. It is a thoughtful and insightful

account of the risks and risks of bipolar disorder. It deals straight on with the myth that medical treatment adversely influences creative work: 'And yet, without the clarity that medication has afforded me, I don't think I could write the poems' (p.52). It asserts the belief that illness-identity and self-identity are coterminous and indistinguishable:

'One painful truth about being bipolar is that I can't excuse my manic behaviour by saying "I wasn't myself." My true self is all over the place. I am myself when I hear voices and I am also myself when I am balanced, centred, with or without the help of medication. Medication doesn't change who I am'.

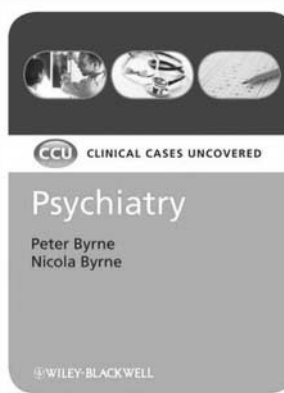
It also deals with the difficulty of working collaboratively with a psychiatrist in the world of the internet.

There is the recurring theme of poetry as a form of prayer. This aspect of the poetry emanating from the disquiet and anguish of depression is present in the work of poets as diverse as Ivor Gurney, Elizabeth Jennings and John Berryman. In this book, Jesse Milner and Thomas Krampf discuss it explicitly. There are several explorations of the nature of depression (Ashley & Twichell), the nature of poetry (Budbill, Haley & Eppolito) and its source, and of the origins of mental distress. Enquiries into the origins of mental distress, particularly in the poets who have undergone or were undergoing therapy, identified childhood experiences as the root of adult disturbance. Only a few poets felt at ease with the language of neurochemistry. This ought not to be surprising, given that literature's wholesale endeavour is to examine life for meaning in psychological and human terms.

The least interesting essays, from a psychiatrist's point of view, were those that appeared to be preoccupied with analysing their own poems. Often the critical analysis was more interesting than the poem itself. Yet, even these essays shed some light on how mood disturbance influences the choice of language and metaphor and ultimately tell us something about the interior life of our patients, revealing aspects of their mental life that we would be otherwise unaware of. This collection of essays would be particularly useful to psychiatrists who have patients from the creative world of literature but I believe also from music, fine art or theatre.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.108.063081



**Psychiatry:
Clinical Cases Uncovered**

By Peter Byrne and Nicola Byrne.
Wiley-Blackwell. 2008.
£19.99 (pb). 240 pp.
ISBN: 9781405159838.

This is a book I wish I had had as a novice. Intended for medical students and junior trainees, it delivers a highly accessible guide to the art of good psychiatric practice.

Part 1 provides comprehensive instruction on the basics in an easy-to-read style, although some of the dense factual tables