

Psychiatry has typically pursued twin goals: gaining a scientific grasp of mental illness, and healing the mentally ill. These have generally been seen as inseparable, but at times one has been emphasized more than another. In the late nineteenth century the priority lay, for many psychiatrists, upon establishing their discipline as a truly scientific enterprise, capable of taking its rightful place in the pantheon of the "hard" biomedical sciences, alongside neurology and pathology, and utterly distinct from such quackish and fringy embarrassments as mesmerism and spiritualism. (p. 183)

Porter challenges the conventional picture of the history of psychiatry as one of progress and enlightenment. He

delights in the human ingenuity and imagination, and in the frailty and egotism displayed throughout that eventful history. Where are we now? According to Porter, psychiatry

still lacks the cognitive and professional unity enjoyed by general medicine and remains torn between biopsychosocial and medical models. ... More people than ever swallow the medications, and perhaps even the theories, which psychiatry prescribes, and attend various sorts of therapists, as the idioms of the psychological and the psychiatric replace Christianity and humanism as the ways of making sense of self — to oneself, one's peers, and the authorities. (p. 217-8)

Madness: A Brief History will change your thinking about mental illness. For those unfamiliar with Roy Porter, it's a tasty hors d'oeuvre to an impressive collection of writing. If you've already made his acquaintance, it will be a satisfying digestif.

The sad part about writing this review is knowing that the gifted Mr. Porter died suddenly and unexpectedly in March while riding his bicycle home from work. He was 55.

Vincent Hanlon
Emergency Physician
Lethbridge, Alta.

Against adversity

The doctor will not see you now

Jane Poulson

Ottawa: Novalis Press; 2002

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Jane Poulson, the first blind physician to graduate from a Canadian medical school, faced a host of illnesses during the course of her life. Starting with type 1 diabetes mellitus and an associated depression in early adolescence, Poulson subsequently encountered blindness, coronary artery disease, inflammatory breast cancer (and devastating adverse reactions to treatment), gout, possible Guillain-Barré Syndrome and, ultimately, the metastatic breast cancer that took her life when she was 49.

Against such a background, how could anyone write an engaging, stylish autobiography? In keeping with her responses to all of life's challenges, Jane Poulson was up to the task.

The title of this collection gives an immediate clue to Poulson's wit. She relates a series of downright funny incidents that exhibit the best of medical black humour. And, in a deeper way, Poulson's wit is evident in her insightful observations on the nature of illness.

Throughout most of her adult life Poulson was unable to read, but she

certainly could write. This book is a good read, and for this reason alone it deserves to be recommended. Readers will laugh along with Poulson, a talented physician with a highly developed sense of irony, as she describes the vicissitudes of her complex and always interesting life.

The many very serious events in Poulson's life — such as adapting to a diagnosis of diabetes as a young adolescent, and identifying her own breast cancer not long after receiving normal results on a mammogram — are related to us in a fashion that deepens our sensitivity as physicians to the import of living with a fatal chronic illness. With nary a whine, but with wisdom and good humour, Poulson reminds us of the frustrations and indignities that patients encounter as they stick-handle their way through our

"seamless" health care system. She also offers her perspective on how simple measures can add dignity and balance to clinical encounters. An example: in an age when a night in one of our emergency departments can make the Bates Motel seem like the Four Seasons, her thoughts on the importance of tranquility and beauty in a patient's surroundings are telling.

I learned a lot about myself during those days of recovery. For one thing, I learned the importance of creating a healing environment.

I had always scoffed at things like aromatherapy, but when I surrounded myself with delicious fragrances, fresh flowers and good music, I found myself healing. I gradually learned to live much less in my head and much more in my body. Even though I could not explain it medically, it helped.

Those of us who were privileged to work with Jane Poulson knew her as an excellent physician and reliable colleague, one who turned adversity into advantage. She was an inspiring physician and teacher whose physical handicaps added to her ability to partner with her patients. Toward the end of



Fred Sebastian

her life Poulson wrote a series of powerful articles on communication, cancer fatigue and the experience of cancer treatment. These articles, first published in leading journals such as the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* and *CMAJ*, are reprinted in her book.

Many of us, in medical school or during the course of our careers, come across a book or an article that profoundly influences our professional lives. Today, when the nature of “med-

ical professionalism” is frequently dissected and debated, Jane Poulson’s final work offers a beautiful illustration of a complete professional’s life. The combination of elegant writing and perceptive analysis evident in *The Doctor Will Not See You Now* is uncommon. Her journal articles, indeed her full autobiography, should be read by all medical students and residents. What a way to start a doctor’s life: with the memorable example of Jane Poulson.

To someone such as myself, who

is too accustomed to writing in a medical cadence, hyperbole does not come easily. Suffice it to say that Jane Poulson’s book almost matches the stature of the woman.

Neil MacDonald

Director, Cancer Ethics Programme
Centre for Bioethics
Clinical Research Institute of Montreal,
and Professor of Oncology
McGill University
Montreal, Que.

Lifeworks

Songs of renewal

Dale Roberts’ sculptural creations are like the working songs of Maritime communities, built up from compounded rhythms, tightly woven harmonies and meticulously ordered repetitions. His larger works expand from their small-scale origins in traditional woven or crocheted textiles, incorporating small units into ceiling-to-floor, free-hanging sculptures divorced (as much by sheer size and narrative sweep as by whimsy) from their original practical functions. Like the traditional “nonsense” lyrics of working songs, the meticulous articulation Roberts gives to these sculptural forms creates greater patterns out of tiny, painstakingly crafted components. They are married to found objects such as driftwood, or to carefully curated objects such as marine “bobbers,” boat bumpers and lead weights. In pieces such as *Testing the Waters* and *Portage*, great drapes of white netting hang from wooden hoops or frames reminiscent of the ribs of ships’ hulls. Smaller wall-mounted sculptures are constructed from layered paper artefacts (such as turn-of-the-century maps), traditional textiles, iron oxides, molten lead, encaustic, pigments and shellac, among other materials that might be found at shipyards and shorelines.

Roberts’ recent show, *Threaded Chronicles*, was presented at the grunt

gallery in Vancouver July 10 – Aug. 10 in conjunction with Convergence 2002, the biennial conference of the Handweavers Guild of America. It’s easy to see why: from traditional, hand-crafted forms Roberts creates beautiful hybrids that transcend the humble units of their making.

With their swelling volumes and minutely diminishing shapes, these composite sculptures are organic not

only in their structural patterns and organisation but also in their way of “growing.” One consists of rope fragments scavenged from coastlines over the period of a year; another is built from 360 crocheted loop circuits that suggest the growth rings of a tree. Other works acquire weathered finishes, patinas or discolorations from exposure to natural elements.

To this end, Roberts “launches”



Dale Roberts, 2002. Installation view, grunt gallery, Vancouver. *Nereid's Gold*. Netting twine/cotton, gold leafed fishing floats, 8'(H) x 14' x 7'. *Testing the Waters*. Wood, crocheted cotton, lead sinkers, 84"(H) x 60" x 27".