

- 23 Caspi A, Hariri AR, Holmes A, Uher R, Moffitt TE. Genetic sensitivity to the environment: the case of the serotonin transporter gene and its implications for studying complex diseases and traits. *Am J Psychiatry* 2010; **167**: 509–27.
- 24 Hariri AR, Mattay VS, Tessitore A, Kolachana B, Fera F, Goldman D, et al. Serotonin transporter genetic variation and the response of the human amygdala. *Science* 2002; **297**: 400–3.
- 25 Surguladze SA, Elkin A, Ecker C, Kalidindi S, Corsico A, Giampietro V, et al. Genetic variation in the serotonin transporter modulates neural system-wide response to fearful faces. *Genes Brain Behav* 2008; **7**: 543–51.
- 26 Neumeister A, Konstantinidis A, Stastny J, Schwarz MJ, Vitouch O, Willeit M, et al. Association between serotonin transporter gene promoter polymorphism (5HTTLPR) and behavioral responses to tryptophan depletion in healthy women with and without family history of depression. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2002; **59**: 613–20.

Poems  
by  
doctors

## The Great Asylums of Scotland

Tom Pow

The great asylums of Scotland, cloistered  
like the proud abbeys we tore down brick  
by brick. Yet harder to love. They docked  
at the edge of our towns like relations  
with whom we felt ill at ease. Ones who kept  
themselves to themselves. Their farms. Their laundries.

Their water supplies. We stand in their portals,  
our eyes drawn down the tree-lined avenues  
to the prospect of distant hills. Country houses?  
Hydros? Oh, what shall we do with them? –  
the great asylums of Scotland, still with us,  
as keen to serve as the day they were built.

A fleet for their time they set out, freighted  
with hope and grand design. Look at them now,  
scuttled on the ocean floor. Light floods them.  
Along their corridors, doors flap open  
on empty cabins with nothing to hide.  
In attic rooms the sky's light pours over

a tide-wrack of maps, plans, records – a grid  
to lay over a waste of rage, grief, anger  
and pain. None of that will make a cairn.  
In these, the great asylums of Scotland,  
always it is evening about to fall.  
The heavy doors are closing in on us all.

and the counting begins. But coming through  
the frayed web of darkness are slants of light:  
greenness, firstness, hope. What is to be done  
with a two-faced legacy such as this?  
Multi-occupancy – that's the answer!  
Flatpacks to the gentlemen's quarters,

IKEA to the boardrooms. Four by fours  
draw up before the great asylums now.  
They're made for them, framed by chestnut trees,  
like adverts. Inside the auction hall –  
the stillness of graveyards, the discretion  
of private affairs. Oh how beautiful

are the crafted dovetailles in the wardrobes  
no one wants. They sulk like small monuments  
history has ignored. So much gloom.  
'I wouldn't want any of it in my house,'  
someone says. 'Not knowing where it's come from.'  
As if objects soak up instability

like nicotine. If so, not only so –  
for writing up the staircase in Crichton Hall  
are oak leaves, carved not by craftsmen from Antwerp,  
but by men traipsing over winter fields  
from Dalton using a water pipe as guide.  
Run your hands over the leaves and you'll feel

their approval for their new asylum.  
Though of the mad, little could be salvaged –  
not one knitted pullover, not one apron –  
for these craftsmen, the trade in lunacy  
was a godsend. The melancholy we mourn  
they transmuted into bread, milk, sunlight.

Tom Pow was writer in residence at the Edinburgh International Book Festival 2001–2003 and poet in residence at StAnza, Scotland's poetry festival. He is senior lecturer at Glasgow University, Crichton Campus, Dumfries. This poem is from his collection *Dear Alice – Narratives of Madness* (Salt, 2008), a poetic response to the Crichton Royal, Dumfries. Reproduced with permission from Salt Publishing Limited. © Tom Pow

Chosen by Femi Oyeboode.

The British Journal of Psychiatry (2011)  
198, 427. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.111.093211