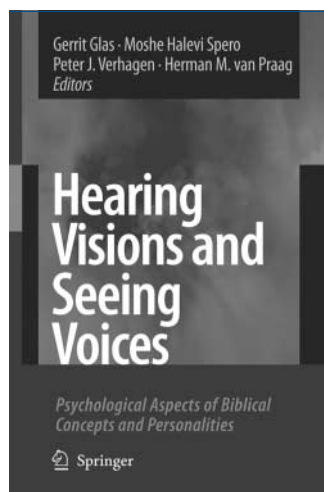


questioning and perhaps accepted some abstracts at face value, leading in places to incorrect conclusions. Thus, I think a better and more analytically thorough job is done by some of the older texts such as Bruce Wampold's *The Great Psychotherapy Debate* (2001).

Sami Timimi Ash Villa Child and Family Services, Willoughby Road, Greylees, Sleaford, Lincolnshire NG34 8QA, UK. Email: stimimi@talk21.com

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.108.061531



Hearing Visions and Seeing Voices. Psychological Aspects of Biblical Concepts and Personalities

Edited by G. Glas, M. H. Spero, P. J. Verhagen & H. M. van Praag
Springer. 2007.
£99 (hb). 326 pp.
ISBN: 9781402059384

Hearing Visions and Seeing Voices arose from a conference that sought to explore the bond between religion and psychology, which the authors suggest lies in their shared history of the *cura animarum*, or the care and cure of the human soul. The book contains a series of erudite reviews on the psychological and theological literature of some iconic Jewish and Christian biblical characters.

The studies on Paul and Jesus are extensive but draw almost exclusively on the theological literature and have little in the way of psychology, possibly because so little was known about the early formative years and the personal lives of these key religious figures. The chapters on the Old Testament Hebrew prophets, especially the one on Jeremiah, draw on Hasidic writers such as Joseph Heschel and show how the Hebrew concept of God changed radically during the prophetic era. Blind obedience to the deity and the law characteristic of the earlier patriarchal period are no longer the sole expectation of the Hebrew God, nor is there to be vengeful punishment for deviation. Instead, society assumes a more compassionate perspective and thus the God of the prophets emerges as a champion of ethical values while the prophets preach on the importance of individual moral responsibility. The beginnings of social justice are to be found in the pleas of Jeremiah, who urges the people to care for the widows and orphans, groups who were dangerously disadvantaged throughout the ancient world. Perhaps here are also to be found the beginnings of socialism. The huge chapter on Job reviews the mainly psychoanalytic literature on his suffering and his stalwart capacity to withstand personal tragedy. It seems as if Job was not an ancient Israelite at all, but most likely a mythical figure of the ancient world that never actually existed (which is most fortunate for Job since he had a truly enormous amount of bad luck).

Only one chapter explores how biblical themes feature in the presentations of common psychiatric disorders today; thus in Switzerland, where the author practises, religious delusions in psychoses may be associated with a demonic presentation in up

to 30% of cases. Some patients, especially those with religious mania, may even trek to the Holy places (the so-called 'Jerusalem syndrome').

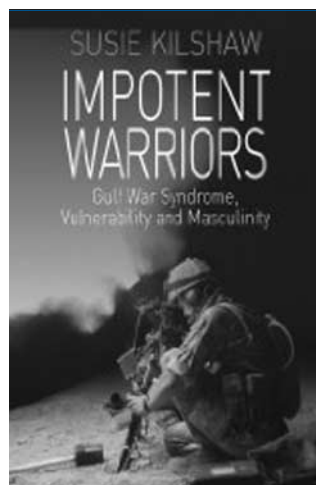
The book also contains brief essays on topics of general interest to psychiatrists difficult to find elsewhere, such as prophetic frenzy, messianism or martyrdom (an act of religious faith) and its relation to suicide (a sin). It ends with a chapter on the lengthy history of biblical psychology which appears to have started in the 16th century. The word *psychologia* was first used by Marulic and popularised in 1530 by Philip Melanchton, a student of biblical psychology and associate of Martin Luther, in his book *Commentarius de anima* which in turn was a commentary on Aristotle's *Peri Psyches* indicating that psychology itself owes its name to the early Lutheran tradition.

Much in this book is fascinating but some of the writing in its unbridled enthusiasm for the topic is barely comprehensible, let alone scientific. At £99 for a mere 326 pages these words of wisdom are very expensive.

The topic attracts a wide audience, yet so little of any academic worth is published in the field. *Hearing Visions and Seeing Voices*, being both scholarly and a rich source of references, is a 'must buy' for all the larger teaching hospital libraries.

George Stein Hayes Grove Priory Hospital, Preston Road, Hayes, Bromley BR2 7AS, UK. Email: george.stein2@btinternet.com

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.108.050039



Impotent Warriors. Gulf War Syndrome, Vulnerability and Masculinity

By Susie Kilshaw.
Berghahn Books. 2008.
£55.00 (hb). 280 pp.
ISBN: 9781845455262

The status of 'Gulf War syndrome' has been the focus of a vigorous and sometimes bitter debate. Groups of veterans suffering from medically unexplained symptoms have argued that their enduring ill health is the result of exposure to toxins while serving in the Gulf. Whether it be side-effects of vaccinations, organophosphates, fumes from oil-well fires or depleted uranium, they believe that their immune systems have been compromised leaving them vulnerable to known diseases. However, their campaign has attracted little support from scientists and doctors who have been unable to identify a unique disorder or a specific pathological mechanism associated with the Gulf War. Because much of this research was funded by government, negative findings have fuelled conspiracy theories and claims of a cover-up. The picture is further complicated because the public in the UK and the USA is generally sympathetic to the veterans' plight and shares their belief in the existence of a definable syndrome.

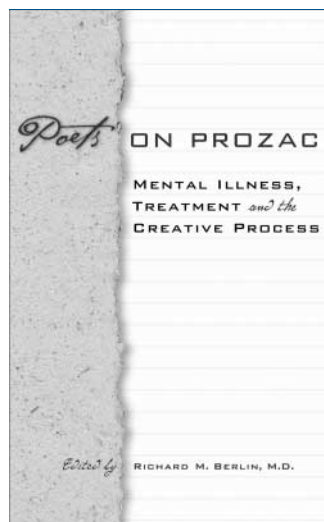
Seventeen years have passed since Gulf War syndrome was first proposed, sufficient time to allow an objective view of these

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.

Edgar Jones King's Centre for Military Health Research, Weston Education Centre, 10 Cutcombe Street, London SE5 9RJ, UK. Email: edgar.jones@iop.kcl.ac.uk

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'.

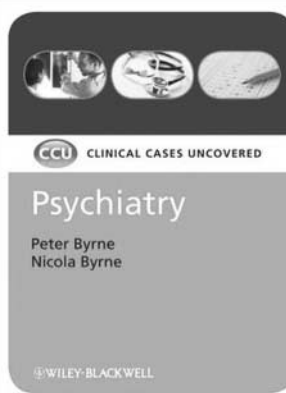
It also deals with the difficulty of working collaboratively with a psychiatrist in the world of the internet.

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.

Femi Oyebode University of Birmingham, The Barberray, 25 Vincent Drive, Edgbaston B15 2FG, UK. Email: femi_oyebode@msn.com

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