

## *Some books for the general practitioner*

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Some years ago I discovered that I felt more at ease with a schizophrenic patient after reading Morag Coates' (1964) book *Beyond all Reason*. Since then various books have come my way which have thrown some light on my patients' problems and feelings. I have now read several books recommended by friends and acquaintances which I think others might enjoy.

Books can be 'educational' at various levels. Perhaps the simplest is the autobiography *Living with an Alcoholic*, by Mary Burton which paints a picture of the tribulation that an alcoholic imposes on his spouse and jerks a faded imagination to reconsider how some patients live.

More skilful writers create the mood and indicate the thoughts and feelings of distressed people (*The Elected Member*, by Bernice Rubens, 1971), while others seem able to illuminate the great psychological truths (*The Bell Jr*, by Sylvia Plath, 1967) and *The Rainbow*, by D. H. Lawrence, 1949).

At our peril do we ignore the sensitivity of writers and the store of knowledge of human nature contained in our literature. Many creative writers seem either to know more of human nature than many professionals or have the ability to express thoughts and feelings which we find difficult to recognise.

In our undergraduate and clinical days we learnt from textbooks, films, lectures, and individual doctors at the bedside or in the consulting room. If we were lucky we also learnt from the behavioural sciences about people and social situations and this knowledge we married with our own personal, but limited experience of life in our childhood, adolescence and adult life.

Literature teaches not 'about' but 'of' people and society, and enables us to add a third dimension to the bit of ourselves we bring to the consultation. It can expand our empathy and compassion.

I am now beginning to use literature for teaching either to illuminate a topic for discussion or when it appears relevant to a clinical problem. I have yet to base a teaching session on a novel or autobiography. Some patients have also been grateful to find that someone else has experienced their thoughts and problems and been able to voice them.

This abbreviated list will not make us better doctors or people, but I know that reading the books has widened my interests and ability to identify with patients and I am sure there are others who would enjoy them. I have enjoyed these books, though some with a lump in my throat.

I would welcome comments and suggestions and I can provide an extended bibliography if anyone is interested. I am particularly grateful to Mrs Irvine of the British Association of Social Workers for suggestions and for putting me in touch with their Working Party. I recommend *Literature and the Social Workers* which is available from The Library Association, 7 Ridgmount Street, London, W.1. price: 80p.

### BOOK LIST

#### Childhood and adolescence

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|----------------------|--|
| Golding, W. (1954)   | <i>The Lord of the Flies</i> . Faber. Makes it clear that Adam ate the apple.                        |
| Harper, L. (1963).   | <i>To Kill a Mocking Bird</i> . An adolescent's summer in America.                                   |
| Hill, S. (1970).     | <i>I'm the King of the Castle</i> . Penguin. Hamish Hamilton.  |
| McCullers, C. (1969) | <i>The Member of the Wedding</i> . Penguin. Curious story of an American girl's family relationship. |
| O'Brien, E. (1971).  | <i>The Country Girls</i> . Hutchinson. Irish-light.  |
| Potok, C. (1971).    | <i>The Chosen</i> . Penguin. Fascinating life of a Jewish adolescent in America.                     |

#### Colour

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|---------------------|---|
| Griffin, J. (1969). | <i>Black Like Me</i> . Panther. Man who pretended to be a negro in America.   |
| Halsell, G. (1971). | <i>Soul Sister</i> . Collins. Woman who pretended to be a negress in America. |

**Drugs**

- Anon (1967). *Go Ask Alice*. Eyre Methuen. A tear-jerking diary of an American adolescent, difficult not to identify as a parent.
- Rubens, B. (1971). *The Elected Member*. Penguin. Amphetamine addict and Jewish life.

**Dying and mourning**

- Evans, J. (1971). *Living with a Man who is Dying*. Blond—Critical of hospital attitudes.
- Gault, D. (1968). *A Journey*. Chatto and Windus. An autobiography of a woman dying of breast cancer. (Now out of print.)
- Hill, S. (1974). *In the Springtime of the Year*. H. Hamilton. A sensitive novel set earlier this century about a young widow.
- Lund, D. (1975). *Eric*. Heinemann. A biography of an adolescent dying of leukaemia and the stress that results in the family. Most moving.
- Solzhenitsyn, A. (1968). *Cancer Ward*. Bodley Head, also in Penguin. A ward is a group—anxieties of treatment.

**Handicaps**

- Brock, M. (1975). *Christopher—A Silent Life*. Macmillan. A moving story written by the mother of a child with congenital rubella and her struggles with bureaucracy.
- Deacon, J. (1974). *Tongue-Tied*. National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children.
- Greenberg, J. (1973). *In This Sign*. Pan books. Novel about deaf people.
- McCullers, C. (1969). *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Barrie, Jenkins or Penguin. An American novel about loneliness and a deaf mute.

**Marriage**

- Barstow, S. (1964). *A Kind of Loving*. Penguin. The search for a partner, set in the North.
- Dickens, M. (1964). *Kate and Emma*. Heinemann. Perhaps it should come under social work or social problems. I enjoyed it immensely.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1949). *The Rainbow*. Penguin. Beautiful story of marital and family interaction.
- O'Brien, E. (1964). *Girls in their Married Bliss*. Penguin.
- Wilson, A. (1958). *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot*. Secker and Warburg and Penguin. Sensitive study of the menopause.

**Mental illness**

- Alvarez, A. (1971). *The Savage God*. Weidenfeld and Nicholson. This is not a novel or biography, but an essay on suicide from a historical and literary viewpoint.
- Coate, M. (1964). *Beyond All Reason*. Constable. The autobiography of a schizophrenic.
- Green, H. (1972). *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. Pan Books. A good American novel about a schizophrenic.
- Plath, S. (1967). *The Bell Jar*. Faber. The autobiography of a poet, her mental illness, treatment, and attempted suicide.

**Prison**

- Curtis, D. (1973). *From Dartmoor to Cambridge*. The autobiography of an ex-con man who does what the title says.
- Zeno (1968). *Life*. Macmillan. Autobiography of life in prison (Wormwood Scrubs mainly).

**Sex**

- Baldwin, J. (1969). *Giovanni's Room*. Corgi. This is set in Paris and gives some idea of the stigma of homosexuality.
- Forster, E. M. (1971). *Maurice*. Edward Arnold. Edwardian book not published for years—homosexual.
- Hall, R. (1972). *The Well of Loneliness*. Corgi. Lesbianism—a classic, tender, and beautiful.
- Parker, T. (1970). *The Twisting Lane*. Panther. Interviews with prisoners in Grendon Underwood.
- Roth, P. (1971). *Portnoy's Complaint*. Corgi. Insights into guilt and impotence and the importance of parental influence.
- Vidal, G. (1972). *The City and the Pillar*. Panther. Explores the emotional as well as the sexual feelings of onanism in a biographical novel.

**Social problems**

- Bennett, A. (1964). *Ricey man Steps*. Pan books. Poverty and a beautifully written portrait of a miser in Edwardian London.

- Brown, C. (1972). *Down all the Days*. Pan books. An autobiography—spastic—poor Irish—inspiring and humbling.
- Burton, M. (1974). *Alcoholic in the Family*. Faber. Written by a wife—humbling for doctors.
- Drabble, M. (1969). *The Millstone*. Penguin. Ooe-patient family
- Hitchman, J. (1971). *The King of the Barbareens*. Penguin. Novel—fostered child biography.
- Reid Banks L. (1971). *The L-Shaped Room*. Penguin. Unmarried mother—her trials and tribulations.
- Sillitoe, A. (1968). *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. Pan. Poverty and deprivation.

#### Social work and psychotherapy

- Axeline, V. (1971). *Dibs—In Search of Self*. Penguin. Child psychotherapy. The blurb says “Dibs is the only real person I ever met in the classroom who could teach me what it means to be a complete person”. Restored my faith in psychotherapy.
- Trench, S. (1970). *Bury Me in My Boots*. Hodder. Identification with dossers.

### UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

**Para 125.** It seems reasonable to suggest that medical education should be based on current medical practice and that if this changes, e.g. with the re-education in the size of the inpatient element of the hospitals concerned, it would be right to modify teaching practice also and base it to a greater extent on outpatient services or possibly on community hospital practice.

London Co-ordinating Committee (1975). *Rationalisation of Services: A Revised Hospital Plan for Inner London*. Para 125, page 24, appendix 3. London: Department of Health and Social Security.

### A CHARTER FOR GENERAL PRACTICE

#### *Team work*

The general practitioner is the health professional who has the primary responsibility to the patient for health care. Division of responsibility leads to dilution of responsibility.

The best care is usually provided when, as far as possible, all medical care is provided by one doctor who seeks specialist and other consultation when he feels this is appropriate. Such consultation should be at the discretion of the general practitioner, who should have freedom to choose who will provide that consultation in the best interests of his patient.

The natural leader of the health team is the general practitioner and he should be trained for this role.

#### REFERENCE

*The New Zealand Family Physician* (1975). 2, 53.

### DIVORCE

The number of divorce decrees granted exceeded 100,000 in the year 1972 for the first time and more than doubled between 1969 and 1972.

### GENERAL PRACTITIONERS AND HEALTH CENTRES

Of the 24,255 general practitioners in Great Britain, 3,537 (14.5 per cent) now work in health centres.