

Out of Hours Books

of medicine, changed beyond recognition during these 100 years.

As with all communities, the residents of Coalbrookdale needed doctors. The story explores the evolution of the discipline that we now recognise as general practice but which started from humble beginnings with apothecaries selling medicines to treat undiagnosed ailments. Their medical education initially involved an apprenticeship and evidence-based medicine simply did not exist.

There are terrifying accounts of cross-infection, management of obstructed labour, and the use of dubious therapies such as blood-letting. Today we read about these with horror, but at the time they knew no better and were doing what they thought was best for their patients. As time passed, the need for this group of practitioners to have a more formal education, recognised qualifications, and ultimately a clear status within the medical profession became apparent.

The doctors lived within the community of Coalbrookdale, practising from the family home, and clearly felt a loyalty to and responsibility for the population they served. They relied on payment from the poor and sick, which was not guaranteed, and the workload was immense with patients able to call day or night. The excessive workload led successive generations of doctors to be physically and mentally exhausted.

The period described in the book ends 150 years ago, a long time perhaps, although the importance of evidence-based practice, the need for a sound medical education, the value of universal health care, and the challenge of physician burnout is as relevant today as it was in Coalbrookdale all those years ago.

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DOI: 10.3399/bjgp16X684637

Nothing but Grass

Will Cohu

Chatto & Windus, 2015, HB, 416pp, £16.99, 978-0701187859



FROM DOGGING TO DEMENTIA

Vignettes of brutality pepper Will Cohu's first novel, set in the Lincolnshire Wolds. An attempted hanging, a graphic animal slaughter, and the drawn-out death of a young mother encircle the central event — the murder and burial of a fellow labourer by Norman Tanner, who utilises his spade for both purposes. At the time the crime seems motiveless, perhaps even unintended (Norman's frigid reaction is bizarre and unfathomable) but nevertheless in the years to come the dead man's sphere expands and begins to envelop its perpetrator.

Cohu paints a jumbled picture of life in the imaginary town of Ranby, ambitiously tackling a century of events spanning the First World War and the 2007–2008 financial crash, and scooping up characters involved in and affected by everything from dogging to dementia. There is an inherent blackness to the novel; an equally bleak eye is cast over family life (with its generous smatterings of abusive teenagers and extramarital affairs) and society in general (rife with racism, sexism, and substance abuse). Neither do the characters demonstrate much moral fortitude, and, although the absence of a protagonist is a little unnerving, it does conjure up an interesting bitterness to the reader.

It's not without its frustrations: the more pedantic among us might legitimately object to the contrived dialogue between the younger characters (extending to some uncomfortable text transcripts) and the flagrant disregard for confidentiality displayed by the local GP! The snaking storylines are so scattered that at times they

seem to slither away altogether, and the reader is left flicking through previous pages in the vain hope of distinguishing 'Joe' from 'Pete' — and what's the connection with Emily again? As a result certain characters feel flimsy, and we are left with a sense of never really having got under anyone's skin.

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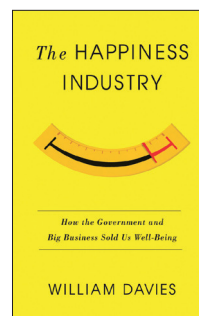
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DOI: 10.3399/bjgp16X684649

The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being

William Davies

Verso, 2015, HB, 320pp, £13.59, 978-1781688458



THE SNARE OF HAPPINESS

We live in an era of unprecedented progress in the study of emotions and, in particular, of happiness. You might assume that this is a good thing but this fascinating book may well persuade you otherwise.

For the last 200 years the study of happiness, or 'well-being' as it has come to be known, has been inextricably linked to the fields of economics and marketing, which has led to some studies, experiments, and outcomes of breath-taking cynicism. Davies tells us that, perhaps unsurprisingly, research and thought in this area have not been directed towards improving the lives of individual people, but have rather been