

Godless Medicine

by Michael F. Wright; New York, TurnKey Press, 2003, 228 pages, \$27.95

The Sixth Cow

by Michael F. Wright; Lincoln, Nebraska, iUniverse, Inc., 2007, 260 pages, \$26.95

Jeffrey L. Geller, M.D., M.P.H.

There are three kinds of authors who have an M.D. or D.O. degree. The first went to school, got a degree, and never practiced medicine, instead focusing his or her career on writing, such as Michael Crichton. The second is a practicing physician and author of well-crafted stories, such as Robin Cook. The third is a practicing or retired physician and an aspiring author who is practicing a craft he has not yet perfected. Michael F. Wright, D.O., a Texas internist and cardiologist, falls into this third category.

The two books reviewed here are Wright's first two novels. The two have much in common. Medical themes are integral to the plots. Both take on issues of political importance. Both have preposterous aspects to the plot development; whether this is intentional or not isn't totally clear. Both pit the forces of good against the forces of evil, with the good guys triumphing in the end. Both have characters that are parodies of themselves. Both are fun reads if one suspends all disbelief, skims through the didactic lectures embedded in the prose, and never wonders how the various characters ended up on the pages of a single novel.

Godless Medicine takes on the corrupt U.S. government, ill-served and underserved Vietnam veterans, rationing medical care for the elderly, the Catholic Church, self-serving senators, petty jealousy, alcohol abuse, conservation and wild life preservation, and sex. *The Sixth Cow* takes on the corrupt pharmaceutical industry, sanctioned and illegal research, clon-

ing, the impaired and impoverished doctor-patient relationship, spying and snooping, and sex.

Individuals in the medical field

will not be surprised by what they find here. Those naive to the issues facing contemporary medicine will be misinformed. That is the unfortunate aspect of these two novels. So much was wrong with medicine in the early years of this century that Wright did not have to invent problems or twist them beyond recognition. His fiction would have been much better had he stuck to the facts. ♦

Scholar by the Warsaw Fire

by Akiva Israel; Tate Publishing, LLC, Mustang Oklahoma, 2006

Carolyn B. Robinowitz, M.D.

Knowing of my penchant for detective stories, Dr. Geller assigned this book to me as "summer reading." After several interrupted attempts to get beyond the first half dozen pages, I realized this book was not a detective story or light summer reading and that my detection task was to understand the author through his use of words, which convey his inner life and function.

This is a book of words, symbols, and rhythmic, musical, and visual impressions. There is no linear or circuitous plot or characterizations often found in novels but rather a stream of consciousness with idiosyncratic and even neologistic use of language and imagery. The publisher informs us that at the time of writing the author was a 20-year-old autistic savant, who had written over 20 books previously, although *Scholar by the Warsaw Fire* is his first publication. Described as living out of a car and working minimal-wage menial jobs, his primary goal is to struggle against the "muteness and maliciousness" of an unachieved goal of returning to college.

Although billed as a novel, the book is a collection of separate short stories, which are chapters taken from earlier unpublished novels and arranged in chronological historical order. Each narrator, who seems to be a stand-in for the author, interweaves

history with his world view in flowing, symbolic, and alliterative language that is interspersed with poetry. Issues that are addressed concern the conflict between life and death, peace and war, and slavery and freedom. The author also includes aspects of Judaism—tradition, faith, relationship with God, and especially the trials and tribulations imposed upon the Jewish people. The endings of each story are not neat conclusions in the usual sense of the word but rather interruptions that in themselves are thought provoking. The introduction and afterword offer explanations of the author's thinking, and they underscore the severe cognitive challenges that impede understanding of his message.

The first vignette is set in Roman times, with the main character—the sole Roman survivor of a battle between Romans and Jews—named Uriahkles wandering near death with painful memories of battles and loss and wistful memories of a warm childhood. Rescued by a peace-seeking physician, Uriahkles becomes a symbol of Roman indestructibility and is rewarded by being appointed procurator of Judea. Eventually after the destruction of the temple, he learns of his Hebrew roots. The his-

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torical descriptions and interactions are presented in an alliterative and florid confluence of words that is both distracting and engaging.

Similar themes and language are experienced in the next four stories. The story that the book takes its title from has the main character living in Czarist Russia, contemplating community destruction and personal loss and an impossible choice reminiscent of more modern Holocaust experiences. A haunting description follows of grief and loss, blood and tears, birth and death, hope and despair, and survival and redemption. These seize the reader, forcing a personal and painful visualization of a time and scene as well as moral dilemmas recaptured in the 20th century.

Equally compelling is the first-person story of the author in school. Issues of family suffering, isolation, and learning have been alluded to in previous chapters. But the specifics of a harsh childhood, loss, his father's suicide, and the pain of the outsider who is perceived as different but

wants to be accepted and recognized is particularly moving. The author captures this in his comments for publication: "The irony of my own life—enduring much pain while embracing the 'gift' of savant autism—allows me to engage the world as one who knows he is an innovator and iconoclast." The final words of this chapter, "I was about to make a friend," reflect his yearning and offer hope.

This is a difficult book—offering an intense and challenging look at the inner world of an intelligent, creative, and challenged young man. The painful experiences of the author, his underlying cognitive as well as emotional disabilities, are moving and thought provoking. As a psychiatrist, I found myself examining the symbolism and structure of his thinking, wondering about the diagnosis and possible benefit of treatment, as well as issues of adaptation and recovery.

I recommend this book to colleagues—to read, reread, marvel, be moved, empathize, and appreciate. ♦

fore her first psychotic episode. Agustina, 16 years younger than Aguilar and "like an older daughter" to him, has previously displayed behavior that Aguilar referred to as "completely crazy" and problematic enough to require attempts at remedying through psychoanalysis, couples therapy, lithium, Prozac, behavior therapy, and gestalt therapy. Despite such problems, Agustina exuded beauty and displayed characteristics of an "exceptional woman" in the eyes of her husband.

In his quest to understand what happened to his wife, Aguilar learns that Agustina's torment began long before they met. The story reveals these past events through a complex web of multiple characters narrating in an alternating fashion between first and third person. A blend of familial mental illness, abuse, irreconcilable desires, and a society battered by war and corruption provides a ripe setting for Agustina's illness to emerge. Regrettably, uncovering Agustina's past does little to deaden Aguilar's pain of watching this beautiful and exceptional woman succumb to the ravages of her mental illness.

Delirium intimately portrays the complexities and devastations of mental illness. Based in Restrepo's homeland, this book reveals the anguish of the unhinged mind. As such, the novel yields value for clinicians, who may lament the fact that Agustina never receives suitable treatment, and nonclinicians alike. The writing style may take the unaccustomed reader by surprise because it lacks customary sentence punctuation. Additionally, Agustina's narrative switches, while arguably appropriate in displaying a divided self, provide challenges for the reader, especially when they occur within sections or sentences. Such challenges do not negate the novel's impressively rich understanding of severe and persistent mental illness. In the end, *Delirium* leaves the reader with a unique and disconcertingly closer look into a world where too many victims of mental illness live. ♦

Delirium: A Novel

by Laura Restrepo; New York, Doubleday, 2007, 336 pages, \$23.95

Kayla L. Fisher, M.D.

Laura Restrepo's novel *Delirium* provides an intimate view of how "insanity" insidiously and yet abruptly emerges and changes lives forever. Most of the book's action takes place in the Colombian capital of Bogotá during the early 1980s. The story begins when Aguilar returns from a four-day trip to find Agustina, his wife with whom he has lived for three years, suffering from psychosis. For Aguilar, Agustina is "transformed into someone terrified and terrifying, a being I barely recognized." Aguilar, an unemployed professor of literature who resorts to selling dog food to

make a living, torments himself trying to find an explanation for his wife's transformation.

Aguilar desperately hopes "to bring Agustina back no matter how much she resists." When doctors find no trace of foreign substances to account for Agustina's condition, Aguilar administers heavy doses of love and patience to no avail. At the urging of an aunt, Aguilar eventually takes Agustina to a hospital where she receives pharmacological treatments of barbiturates and sodium amytal. Sadly, yet understandably, none of these interventions provide any significant relief from Agustina's agitated highs, catatonic lows, or terrifying delusions.

Less severe concerns about Agustina's functioning existed be-

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Hurricane Punch: A Novel

by Tim Dorsey; New York, William Morrow, 2007, 384 pages, \$24.95

Suzanne Vogel-Scibilia, M.D.

Tim Dorsey fires off his ninth book, *Hurricane Punch*, a fictional account of a pair of would-be serial killers, the psychiatrically unstable Serge A. Storms and his inebriated sidekick Coleman, who like to chase the edge of the hurricane while drinking peyote-laced “hurricane punch.” Starting off with the three main characters, Serge, Officer Maloney, and Reporter McSwirley in three adjacent therapists’ offices, Dorsey spins a farcical tale laced with dark humorous invective that pokes fun at reporters, police officers, and psychiatrists. The book starts with the assumption that Serge and Coleman are a serial-killing duo. But is there another perpetrator on the beaches of Tampa, Florida?

Some of Dorsey’s other books may stall as the story progresses, but *Hurricane Punch* keeps running to the end on the edges—the edge of the plot, the edge of hurricanes, and the edge of significantly irreverent commentary about people with mental illness and the people who treat them. There are numerous references to the assumption that a serial killer could have two personalities and be murdering without knowing it, could have violent behavior as a common consequence of mental illness, or could be killing in a deviously crafty manner as an indicator of insanity.

Psychiatrists are portrayed as bored, dull observers who either want to give Serge controlled substances and have him kickback half of the money made from selling the drugs or who hide behind the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and conspire not to report dangerous behavior. They seem incapable of contributing to the mental health of their clients. Serge’s therapist can’t even confront

his dangerous behavior appropriately. During the appointment after an act of violence by Serge in the psychiatrist’s parking lot after the previous session, the psychiatrist confronts Serge about the attack. The doctor comments only that the perpetrator was yelling “bad monkey,” the behavioral therapy concept that the therapist had been trying to have Serge focus on right before the attack. In fact no one, including the

police, have even half the skills necessary to reign in Serge and Coleman’s actions. The ending is extremely implausible to the average reader and even less believable to mental health therapists.

Overall, this book was well written and crafted mechanically. The story kept my attention and interweaved multiple plots simultaneously. The only problem is the rendering of psychotherapy and especially the treatment of persons with mental illness. If only Dorsey could spend his time poking fun at targets other than people with brain disorders and their therapists. ♦

Call Me by Your Name: A Novel

by André Aciman; New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007, 256 pages, \$23

Lee Combrinck-Graham, M.D.

For those of us whose children have passed adolescence and whose practices allow for only fleeting visits from adolescents in crisis, this book is a refreshing reminder of the nonpathological love obsession and search for identity that can make adolescence a time to be relished.

The story is told through the eyes of a 17-year-old boy, the only child of a professorial American father and an Italian mother. The protagonist, Elio, is brilliant and knowledgeable about music, history, classics, and visual arts. He readily plays tunes on the piano in the style of Bach or Brahms. Elio is beloved and trusted by his parents, who are well enough off that they summer in a villa on an Italian coast and have several servants.

Each summer Elio’s father invites a scholar to spend the summer months in a room next to Elio’s. This summer, the occupant is 24-year-old Oliver, already an assistant professor at Columbia, who has come to work on his book about the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who taught of change and transformation. Heraclitus wrote, “No man steps in the same river twice, for it is not the

same river and he is not the same man.”

The story starts with first impressions and builds through Elio’s attraction to the very attractive Oliver. It begins with Elio’s observation about Oliver’s soft white skin and goes to his observations of Oliver’s easy confidence in correcting his father whom Oliver casually calls “Pro.” Elio lingers in many states of passionate obsession that are recorded in his diary and in chance remarks, eventually speaks to Oliver directly, and then suffers the uncertainty of Oliver’s response.

Call Me by Your Name is not about homosexuality, though the lovers are men. Each has relationships with women. The book is about an adolescent obsession and admiration for an older person that begins as an ego ideal and then becomes a stronger passion. That passion propels a desire to be like that person and a desire to be that person. Both desires become sexualized, because wanting to be the person involves getting under his skin and into his body. In this story, the

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culmination of this imperative intimacy is the demand to “call me by your name.”

Elio and Oliver’s relationship is the kind of relationship that shapes one’s identity and is forever memorable as the ideal. Is this what all adolescents experience on their way to forming a personal identity and engaging in adult intimacy? Perhaps as an epic represents “everyman’s” experience, yes.

Author André Aciman was born in

Egypt to a Sephardic Jewish family holding Turkish nationality. His family moved to Rome when he was 14, and at 18 they moved to New York. He teaches at the Graduate Center of the University of New York. He is described as living in Manhattan with his family. His book is dedicated to Albio, “Alma de mi vida.” If this book is biographical, we can wonder whether the author is represented as Elio or Oliver, or both. ♦

greater understanding of his father and surprisingly leads him to understand his mother and his own background. Scott Turow orchestrates the tempo of events superbly and beautifully describes the sequences in war, the hair-raising battles, the transformation of roles, and tender, passionate moments amidst the destruction. By also depicting a brave, tender, caring, and resourceful woman in World War II, Turow has clearly articulated the heroic deeds of women in that era.

This is an elegantly written novel describing the calamities of war and transformation of ordinary individuals to heroes under extreme situations. ♦

Ordinary Heroes: A Novel

by Scott Turow; New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2005; 371 pages, \$25

Jagannathan Srinivasaraghavan, M.D.

This is an artfully written novel about World War II. Scott Turow has written some best-selling novels before writing this one. His father was a field surgeon in Europe during World War II, and Turow has heard many stories from him. After publicly committing on a television interview that his next book would be about World War II, he researched the subject and also received unsolicited help from some sources. He expanded on such stories to write this novel that interweaves real events and places with imaginary people.

Stewart Dubinsky only knew that his father David Dubin—Stewart reverted to the original name his father had Americanized—served in World War II and married a woman rescued from the Balingen concentration camp. David rarely shared much information about his war experiences with his children. Following David’s death, Stewart learns of his father’s court martial and imprisonment from wartime letters that his father had written to a former fiancée. Much against the wishes of his mother and sister, he embarks on

a journey to uncover the truth about his elusive and enigmatic father.

Stewart learns more about his father through military archives, letters, and a memoir his father wrote while in prison that was preserved by the officer who defended him. Stewart learns that his father, a JAG lawyer attached to General Patton’s Third Army was dispatched to arrest another officer, Robert Martin, for not following the orders of his commander. He is being arrested despite his extraordinary bravery and knowledge about the warfare needed in France to defeat the enemies. While investigating and following the path of Robert Martin, David gets involved with one of the loyal and elusive comrades of Robert Martin, named Gita Lodz.

David is parachuted into Bastogne as the Battle of the Bulge rages. Even though David’s goal was to pursue and arrest Robert Martin, he has to assume the leadership role of a heavily depleted rifle company lacking a leader and supplies. In the middle of the winter he is forced to abandon the search for Robert Martin and fight for his life and his rifle company.

With the reconstruction of events, Stewart is able to appreciate the agonizing choices his father faced in the battlefield, his love life, and the courtroom. This gives Stewart a

Last Seen Leaving: A Novel

by Kelly Braffet; Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 260 pages, \$23

Anita Everett, M.D.

The intriguing second novel by Kelly Braffet, *Last Seen Leaving*, is a story that can be understood on many levels and has interesting interpersonal relationships and characters that are developed well throughout the story.

The book has multiple subplots that develop along several converging lines. An estranged mother-daughter relationship is developed from the perspective of a mother who does the best she can to raise a daughter as a single parent and a daughter whose life is indelibly marked by an idolized father. The father has been missing in action as a pilot since Miranda was a child and is romanticized by both Miranda and her mother throughout the story. Miranda has an off-beat, antisocial bent to her personality that includes risk-taking behavior, sexual

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promiscuity, and geographic impulsiveness. At one point, while her mother is trying to find her, Miranda takes up with a quiet stranger who may be connected with her father's mysterious espionage past or who may be the local serial murderer in search of his next victim.

Last Seen Leaving is not a novel that has an explicit connection with psychiatry, mental health, advocacy, or a consumer's or family member's lived experience with a mental illness. It is a novel that has many very inter-

esting characters including minor characters that readily come to life through the craft of Braffet. The central characters have enough internally consistent development and behavior to make the book hang together well. This is not a work that reeks of amateur attempts to create a personality disorder or mental illness, which can be distracting for mental health professionals who read fiction. *Last Seen Leaving* is a very entertaining work that is enjoyable on many levels, even for mental health professionals. ♦

The Uses Of Enchantment: A Novel

by Heidi Julavits; New York, Doubleday, 2006, 368 pages, \$24.95

Roger Peele, M.D.

Sheela Kadekar, M.D.

In the mid-1980s, about the time this novel begins, Jeffrey Masson claimed that "every patient treated since the invention of psychoanalysis should be recalled, like the Ford Pinto." Masson declared that Freud had erroneously assumed that the reports of sexual abuse by his patients were fantasies. In *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, the 14-year-old Dora had alleged she was sexually abused by "K," which Freud interpreted as fantasy. In this novel by Heidi Julavits, a teenager, Mary, reads Freud's book on Dora, then, on November 7, 1985, disappears for about six weeks.

Upon returning to her family and school, she goes into treatment to address her amnesia, which was supposedly triggered by what happened during those six weeks. Through her psychotherapist's working notes, we are told what happens during this early time frame after her return. The therapist, however, having once made the "mistake" a number of years previously of assuming a student had been sexually abused, is careful not to

make that interpretation again. Instead, he even comes up with a theory about why young girls have such fantasies and writes a best-selling book about it.

Exactly 14 years later to the day, November 7, 1999, Mary's mother dies, and this brings Mary, who is living 3,000 miles away, back into strained relationships within her family and with her former therapist. After the funeral, Mary addresses relationships with her family, including her dead mother, and her therapist.

In addition to chapters of therapist notes and chapters of events immediately after the funeral, there are chapters on what might have happened with an older man called "K" for the first 36 hours of the disappearance.

Reflections on the weeks of disappearance attract self-serving interpretations by family, classmates, theory-building therapists, and Mary herself. These interpretations are explicated in fascinating dialogues of the characters, all of whom are totally self-absorbed. These dialogs and Julavits's descriptive abilities rule out a single boring page. A lot of wit and humor fill the book.

Upon finishing the book, you will want all the hypotheses as to what happened during Mary's disappearance to be recalled. ♦

Arthur and George

by Julian Barnes; New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2006, 400 pages, \$24.95

Joseph Berger, M.D.

This novel is based on a true story that took place over 100 years ago in England, toward the end of the Victorian era. The Arthur in this book's title is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. George is George Edalji, a man whose father is of Indian origin and is vicar in a small local church in the Midlands. Arthur grows up with all the advantages of the British aristocracy, and he becomes a doctor specializing in ophthalmology and a first-rate cricket player. George has led a very sheltered life, was bullied at school, and was inadequate at sports. He is shy and inhibited and remains closely attached to his parents and family. He qualifies as a solicitor and even writes a guide to railway law.

Their paths cross after George, now 27, has been falsely accused of brutally harming horses, convicted, and jailed. From the time of the first accusations, George, having great faith in the rightness of the law and of justice, naively believes that nothing will come of the accusations. Surely the police will see that there is no case, and when the police do make a case, George remains convinced that a court will see the glaring absence of any solid evidence linking him to the monstrous crimes. Yet the court finds him guilty.

At that time there was no court of appeal, and, therefore, the only recourse was a petition to a senior government minister known as the home secretary. George is released almost halfway through his sentence of seven years. Apparently the home secretary decided that the original sentence was excessive, but there is no explanation for the early release, no cancellation of the conviction, no apology, and no offer of compensation.

Because of his fame as the creator

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of Sherlock Holmes, Arthur receives numerous petitions asking him to prove that a person is innocent of the crimes he or she is supposed to have committed and should be released from prison. Someone has sent him George's compilation of his case petition describing the numerous frauds and errors that had been committed, and Arthur strives powerfully to clear George's name and obtain compensation for George and his reinstatement as a solicitor.

Arthur and George is the 12th novel by the English writer Julian Barnes. It develops the growth and characters of these two quite different men in great detail, and in doing so takes us into British life during that period. Readers see the class barriers and behaviors, the racial prejudice, the position of women and the attitudes toward them, the courts and prison system, and attitudes toward military service. Barnes' research has

been meticulous, and in this beautifully written work he evokes life in those times in a manner that captures our ongoing interest.

There are many fine, subtle touches that the author offers us. In just half a page that reports a summary from a school principal about a more likely criminal suspect than George, we see how even a first-rate education system did not understand how to deal with below-average intelligence and appeared to believe that such a child must be exhibiting a failure of will that more and more beatings would eradicate.

Those of British origin or who enjoy visiting Britain will recognize vestiges of the attitudes and behaviors of the society described in this book that still persist and are responsible for what remain as the attractive aspects of a Britain that has developed into a very different society in recent years. ♦

back after a lengthy affair with a married man, and it's not going so well. Evan, ever helpful as in life, wants to assist her, but he seems powerless to interact with the inhabited world. What happens from there is perhaps the real awakening in the book.

This book can be read quickly, but it has multiple layers of meaning to be mulled over at greater leisure. This is not a typical ghost story. The prose is well crafted, the important characters fully fleshed out, the psychological struggles intensely realistic, and the concept of purgatory—both while living and after death—quite unique. Anyone who is psychologically minded will find this a fascinating piece of literature. In an interview published online, the author said that he looks carefully at the thin line between success and failure, and how a "small detail" can make all the difference. This is a book full of small details leading to important results, both failures and successes. ♦

The Inhabited World: A Novel

by David Long; Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 288 pages, \$23

Alan D. Schmetzer, M.D.

For his fifth novel, author David Long began with the words, "Ghost of a suicide" scribbled on a scrap of paper. From there, he went on to construct a very different view of what the afterlife might hold. His main character is already dead when the book opens. In a series of flashbacks, intertwined with stories of others who unknowingly live alongside "the ghost," he paints a vivid picture of real life—its meanings, its everyday dramas, its difficulties, and ultimately its triumphs.

The main character, Evan Molloy, is a successful man from a good family. He is college educated, not particularly religious, and a typical product of 1970s America—a bit of a rebel but not too much. While he

was alive, he always wanted to do the right thing. But his burden, among others, is a recurrent depression. Because his father is a strong character, he hates to admit this weakness in himself. He seeks treatment but unfortunately not enough to keep him from killing himself. The suicide, although premeditated, is sort of offhand and occurs when he is on leave from work and alone at home after his wife leaves him. His suicide itself is described only in the vaguest terms, as is his awakening four months later. He finds himself in limbo, able to roam about only his former house and yard.

Over the ten years since his suicide, other families have come and gone, inhabiting the house in parallel with Evan. But they don't really need his help. Eventually, however, a single woman, Maureen, moves in. Maureen is trying to get her life

Free Food for Millionaires

by Min Jin Lee; New York, Grand Central Publishing, 576 pages, 2007, \$24.99

Edward Kantor, M.D.

In her first novel, *Free Food for Millionaires*, Min Jin Lee largely succeeds in unraveling the story of postcollege, Korean immigrant Casey Han, who is still challenged by her family traditions while striving for acceptance and personal fulfillment in the largely assimilated world of New York high finance. As the main character's life unfolds, Lee masterfully reveals the fallible interpersonal relationships that define Han's struggle. She also manages to tell the story from multiple perspectives, allowing

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the characters richness and authenticity that is often missing in the single point of view.

This story is interesting, and these conflicts and complex individuals have much to offer mental health professionals. Although the characters are not always likable, I found myself relating to them as typical of the people I know, work with, or become at times. The book is not specifically about mental illness, but by emphasizing the mental lives of her characters, Lee captures the realities, raw interactions, and imperfections that define day-to-day relationships. She deftly highlights her characters' passage through hardships, uncertainty, and self-reflection toward a more palatable concept of the self. In fact, Lee states that she chose the name Han for the main character because in Korean it reflects severe angst and suffering amidst difficulty and loss.

Lee moved to Queens, New York, at the age of seven from South Korea with her family. Although they did not operate a dry cleaning business as in the novel, her parents ran a wholesale jewelry business, and she attended public school. She graduated from Yale and completed law school at Georgetown. The story has at least some autobiographical reflections and adds to Lee's credibility as a commentator.

It would be easy to categorize the book as just one more coming-of-age story involving an immigrant family. Somehow, it seems much more than that. There is a universal appeal in Lee's writing that transcends culture and exposes the reader to the characters at a very human level. A long novel, at 576 pages, it rarely dragged and managed to keep my interest throughout. *Free Food For Millionaires* will likely please practitioners of any field involving the human condition. ♦

some much-needed depth to Seeley's character. As a consequence, he seems to be a caricature of a hero with an Achilles' heel. Other characters are often used as shallow "bad guys" who are all out to get him, whether by humiliating him through his alcoholism or by tempting him to give up sobriety—one character even refuses to conduct business with Seeley unless he shares a drink with the man. Such moments often seem out of sync with the other characters' roles in the book. Undoubtedly, this is often how Seeley—who comes across as rather narcissistic and passive-aggressive—sees the world: he is the victim/hero, and the others are his tormentors, who secretly delight in his failure.

Toward the end of the novel, the narrative waxes philosophically: "How little we know about the motives of those we would let control us . . . the long line of . . . oppressors, real and imagined. Our ignorance gives them a power over our lives that none of them would even dream of; our attempts to undermine their authority work only to enhance it We are victims of victims." Goldstein should have spent the time to elaborate on these themes more clearly throughout the story!

Goldstein is at work on his next novel featuring Michael Seeley. One hopes that next time, Seeley might have more insight into the difference between abstinence and sobriety. ♦

Errors and Omissions

by Paul Goldstein; New York, Doubleday, 2006, 320 pages, \$24.95

Patricia R. Recupero, J.D., M.D.

In this legal thriller by first-time novelist and intellectual property law expert Paul Goldstein, we meet Michael Seeley, protagonist of *Errors and Omissions*, when the author opens with "The worst part of being drunk before breakfast is the hangover that returns before noon." Seeley is an artists' rights lawyer whose successful career seems to be next on the list of casualties in the war between the bottle and man. Goldstein wastes no time in drawing the reader in to witness the spectacle of Seeley's drunken misbehavior in a judge's chambers, followed by a glimpse into his failing marriage and floundering career. His partners give him a humiliating ultimatum: take a case he doesn't want or lose his job.

Seeley takes the case but stops short of agreeing to sign a fraudulent opinion.

The novel is a suspense-driven mystery with a strong film-noir feel, somewhat far-fetched in its premise but well suited to the Hollywood setting where much of the action takes place. Goldstein weaves a number of interesting subplots into the story, including the Communist blacklist in the mid-20th century and its impact on Hollywood, the Nazis, and the cut-throat code of modern corporate politics. This book has all of the elements of a well-crafted mystery except for a sympathetic main character.

Seeley's alcoholism may be one of the central themes in the plot, but at times it seems superficial. One understands why the author would need his main character to remain sober throughout much of the story; it's hard to play detective or to conduct business while drunk. However, the author has not taken adequate time to give

The Double Bind

by Chris Bohjalian; New York, Shaye Areheart Books, 2007, 384 pages, \$25

Maggie Bennington-Davis, M.D.

Chris Bohjalian is a favorite author of mine. He wrote *Midwives*, *Before You Know Kindness*, *Buffalo Soldier*, and *Trans-Sister Radio*, among others. Each of these books catapults the reader into one or another provoking societal issue.

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A review of any would fit easily into the book review section of *Psychiatric Services*. *The Double Bind*, Bohjalian's tenth book, takes on issues of mental illness and homelessness directly.

The novel, like Bohjalian's other works, is complex and difficult to describe. It is half-sequel to *The Great Gatsby* and half suspense. Its references to *Gatsby* are so confident that halfway through *The Double Bind* I set it aside to reread *Gatsby* and assure myself that it too is fiction, not history.

The Double Bind's protagonist is Laurel, a college sophomore who is attacked and nearly killed while bicycling in rural Vermont. She withdraws from her previous life but eventually finishes a degree in social work and, fast-forward a few years, works for a homeless shelter in Burlington. When a mentally ill, homeless man named Bobbie Crocker dies, he leaves a collection of photographs of famous people and, eerily, of a girl on a bicycle on the very rural road where Laurel was attacked, perhaps Laurel herself. To complicate matters, there are other images of where Laurel grew up, which is near *Gatsby*'s cousin Daisy Buchanan's home in West Egg, the fictional setting of *The Great Gatsby*.

Interestingly, Bohjalian, in an author's note, tells the reader that the photos of famous people really were

in the possession of a real homeless man who died in a homeless shelter in Burlington. Several of the pictures are reproduced in the book and feature Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Walt Whitman, Martin Luther King, and other famous figures.

Bohjalian treats issues of both mental illness and homelessness with empathy and compassion. Excerpts of the progress notes of Bobbie's state hospital psychiatrist lend an air of authenticity to the story. Imagining that Bobbie was an amazing photographer before homelessness and institutionalization got in the way adds warmth to the book, and anger comes from Bobbie's fictional family, the Buchanans, abandoning him because of shame about his mental illness.

Laurel launches into a search based on the photographic clues. The search is actually two searches—one to discover the real identity of Bobbie Crocker and one to discover herself. The book's title hints at the twist ending, but I didn't see it coming.

Complexity, photography, and F. Scott Fitzgerald aside, the writing is occasionally stilted, choppy, and awkward, especially in the first half of the book. Many passages seem to come from a first-time writer who has a good idea but can't figure out how to express it through the characters' dialogue. Eventually the read is worth your time, and it could keep you up all night. ♦

she's a natural, but if Josephine had any background in private detection, I missed it.

Of course, I might have missed it. I read *Dope* while on jury duty, where I was missing my usual Wednesday gig consulting with case managers and seeing outpatients. Except for the obvious soul searching that accompanied carrying around a book called *Dope* within the marble grandeur of the county courthouse, this compact yarn spun well in the waiting room, between wondering about criminals and fulfilling my civic duty.

Dope is a mystery, a thriller, a story absorbed with following the momentum of its own narration. One step leads to the other, and every night is followed by the next morning. Events occur on a personal level. *Dope* is a book about people, most of them drug-dependent individuals, criminals, and hookers.

Dope is a readable book. It moves its abstinent narrator through a number of drug-soaked environments in New York City during the 1950s. Although there are several lowdown entertainment venues featured, all are fictional, and the author, Sara Gran, doesn't bring in much of the major bebop music that was being created around that time. One club, Rose's in midtown, does have a band, but those dudes take a quick backseat. It might have been fun to have John Coltrane or Miles Davis blowing from a corner stage.

Sex is present in the novel, although not much for our heroine. Most of the sex is basically love for sale, especially in one nightmarish basement location where men and women apparently meet for anonymous coupling on bare mattresses separated by hanging sheets.

And there's death. But I don't want to tell that part of the book because the tragic, neat twist at the end is one of the book's strengths, especially for those readers who love plot. But I couldn't quite follow it.

The prose in *Dope* is serviceable, the characters somewhere between high-end network and cable television quality, and the action is okay. Yet the pages keep turning anyway. ♦

Dope: A Novel

by Sara Gran; New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2006, 256 pages, \$21.95

Chuck R. Joy, M.D.

Maybe this little volume would be better titled *Ex-Dope*, because its main character, a girl named Josephine, has had enough experience with heroin to decide that she's better off not using it—not any more anyway.

I'm a child psychiatrist, community-oriented, and specialize in helping

systems work together, including our drug and alcohol system. I trained in West Virginia, where we had our share of charismatic former addicts, one male addict in particular.

Josephine is nothing like him. She isn't out to help anybody, at least not overtly. She's looking for money. And she's so in love with herself that she doesn't blink when strangers offer her a lot of money to find their missing daughter. She must think

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Memorial: A Novel

by Bruce Wagner; New York, Simon and Schuster; 2006, 528 pages, \$26

Richard Balon, M.D.

The title of this book evokes the commission that one of this hefty volume's heroes, architect Joan Herlihy, hopes to get for her architectural firm. A billionaire wants to build a private memorial on 400 private acres in Napa Valley as a tribute to his brother who died in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The book, using a style similar to modern movie techniques, intertwines snapshots or pieces of action from the stories of Joan, her mother Marjorie, her brother Chester, and her father Ray, who abandoned the family long ago.

We follow Joan through her affair with her client—although one of her rules was never to become involved with clients—an incredibly rich, smart billionaire who showers her with expensive gifts. We also watch her mother being scammed by an unbelievably smart group of crooks, who are able to clean out all her accounts and even get her jewelry. In the meantime, Chester is suing a movie company for a small injury resulting from a prank. Finally, Ray is getting money from a lawsuit against the city, after the police mistakenly raid his house and shoot his dog.

The individual stories are heading toward individual catastrophes. Joan's firm does not get the commission. Marjorie loses all her possessions, and even her house is set on fire. In an almost psychedelic ending, Chester ends up in India with a girlfriend named Laxmi—her hippie father “was a failed Jewish poet who'd hung with Ginsburg during the latter's early 60s Benares sojourns.” Yet, as in a fairy tale, Marjorie buys a winning lottery ticket and Joan, who is pregnant with the married billionaire's baby, gets a hefty sum from the father-to-be to “be quiet about the paternity.” The future looks brighter,

and wishes for the American dream are back.

The book mixes many things—sex, art, movies, TV, lawsuits, money, and money scams—like some television shows do. The writing almost evokes a CNN screen that is crammed with too many facts. The writing style could be perceived as impressive or trying to impress. For example, Wagner writes, “But LA, like everything

else, was being digitized, devoured, and decoded, memorialized like some newfangled karma/chimera/camera chameleon.” Or the description of the billionaire's plan to build a “bright lit ballroom that was to be a replica of Moscow Metro's Komsomolskaya station, complete with subway cars as lounges.”

Maybe this book is a picture of modern California or even the entire United States. I hope not. Some may find it to be an interesting and entertaining reading. But as for the masterpiece the cover flap claims it to be, it is not. ♦

What You Have Left: A Novel

by Will Allison; New York, Free Press, 2007, 224 pages, \$23

Nabil Ali, M.D.

Will Allison's *What You Have Left*, his first novel, chronicles the life struggles and resolutions of three generations of a South Carolina family. Allison places the majority of this novel in his hometown of Columbia, South Carolina. Primarily a short-story writer, he creates his chapters as sections of perspective from his three primary protagonists. Holly is raised by her grandfather Cal after the death of her mother and abandonment by her father. Wylie is the father who abandons Holly following his wife's death and was further distanced from his daughter by his father-in-law. And Lyle is Holly's fiancée and Cal's right-hand employee.

Cal, despite being a secondary character, provides the link among the major characters and is the most interesting subject in the book for psychiatric professionals. The biopsychosocial aspects of his suicide and the effect it causes on the other characters provide an alternate perspective—which limits the psychological part of the biopsychosocial triad—on the causal relationship of behavior and emotion.

Cal's suicide results from a preemptive strike against illness rather than an illness itself. There are no signs or symptoms of depression that typically

precede a suicide attempt; rather it takes place to prevent the effects of dementia brought on by Alzheimer's. Cal's biological predisposition for dementia forces him to face the possibility of living his latter years like his predecessors. Instead, he chooses what he believes to be a more dignified death. The timing of his suicide comes after he has set the long-term safety of his granddaughter into motion. Holly has already been abandoned by her father and gone through the death of her mother, and her well-being prevents Cal from attempting suicide earlier. He must first provide her shelter and support. The former is done by rejuvenating his dairy farm and the latter by expediting her relationship with Lyle. Once Cal accomplishes this, his familial obligations are met.

Cal's death reverberates through the remainder of the novel. His proactive approach to problem solving contrasts with the remaining characters who remain complacent in their inertia. Holly struggles to find a substitute for gambling. Lyle struggles to maintain employment, and

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Wylie avoids the death of his wife by running away from his daughter and drinking himself into dementia. Cal's death allows the other family members to take action, albeit as a way of defying him. Holly actively seeks her father. Wylie confabulates his attempting to meet Holly during his bout with Korsakoff's syndrome. Lyle protects Holly in her reckless periods rather than argues with her, which Cal had done with her mother. The indirect actions against Cal physically manifest when Holly and Lyle burn

Cal's belongings in effigy at the dairy farm, without any precipitating factor.

What You Have Left exemplifies a scenario in which a suicide presents more than a suicide and more than an end point of psychological depression. For Cal, it creates an opportunity to defeat his biological predisposition for dementia. Socially, it breaks the stagnation of the remaining family members. For psychiatric professionals, it provides an example in which a psychiatric outcome does not result from psychological factors. ♦

of his own injury. The story is told in the soft, wide-eyed voice of a child, and the author does an admirable job of conveying the deeper desperations of the other characters through the ponderings of the main character. It is a charming story, with a more or less happy ending in a "God is in Heaven and all is right with the world" style.

The story is set in the late 1970s. The children watch *Wonder Woman* on TV and put pictures of Eric Estrada on their bedroom walls. The ladies wear hats, and there is a complete lack of compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. In fact, the story is one long gossip-fest among the hospital staff and patients, a strange reminder to those of us in the field as to why privacy regulations exist. The book's dated setting is jarring, perhaps because we are now so inundated with demands for patient privacy. But it adds a certain charm as well, and maybe the story could not be told without the willing descriptions from the hospital staff. One has the impression, however, that the story is set in the 1970s because it took place then. I find myself wondering: why tell this story now? ♦

Riley's Fire

by Lee Merrill Byrd; Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Shannon Ravenel Books, 2006, 272 pages, \$19.95

Caroline Fisher, M.D.

Lee Merrill Byrd's *Riley's Fire* is the story of a boy who survives a fire and his initial months of treatment at the Shriners' Burn Center. The book's jacket notes that the author's

own sons survived a fire as well, and the acknowledgments state that the story is set in the old Shriners' Burn Center, not the new one built in 1992. Riley awakens there, drifting in and out of consciousness, and the story unfolds gently as he gradually becomes conscious of his family's pain, his roommates' dramas, and the meaning

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2008 Institute on Psychiatric Services: Deadlines for Presentations and Posters

The 60th Institute on Psychiatric Services (IPS) will be held October 2–5, 2008, at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago. The theme for the meeting is "From Patient to Partner: Transforming Systems of Care." The submission deadline for workshops, symposia, and innovative program sessions is December 10, 2007. The poster submission deadline is June 2, 2008. All program presenters receive a discount on their registration fee.

To access the IPS online submission system, go to www.psych.org/public_info/libr_publ/meetings/ips.cfm. For answers to questions about submissions, please contact Jill L. Gruber, Annual Meetings Department, American Psychiatric Association, at 703-907-7815 or jgruber@psych.org.