In *The Wound Dresser*, Jack Coulehan continues the conversation that poets engage in to heal the spirit.

Drawing from a lifetime of repairing the body, he paints delightful, witty, engaging portraits. The poet’s voice is erudite, playful, and wise. He listens intently to the voices he hears, and he weaves them into the fabric of his poems. *The Wound Dresser* taught me something about the healing arts—and even more about the art of healing.

Some poems made me laugh out loud. Among the poet’s early encounters with physicians, there’s “Dr. Barrone” making a home visit smelling “like a monsignor/smoking a cigar” as he “burst/into his wicked leer,” and gave him “poison” pills that “turned my teeth/yellow.”

Then there’s the “hairy man” with Ernie Kovac’s eyebrows in “Role Model” who “dug his thumbs/into my spine, humming,” and lectured the 15-year-old against masturbation and “entanglement with girls.” The poem ends:

...A vague craving began to unfold, a thirst to prove the quack completely wrong, to master my own medicine.

These poems show the writer’s talent for using sensory details to create characters, for developing a dramatic scene, and for punctuating the poem with a larger vision.

The pleasure of reading “Pair Chase Boy for His Urine” is increased by the strict structure of rhythm and rhyme in the villanelle form. This is in contrast with the couple’s lack of foresight indicated by the ironically repeated line, “It’s a solid plan they’ve hatched.”

This villanelle, the tight quatrains of “Ockham’s Razor,” and the sonnet “Retrospective” are unusual in a volume of open form poems that are structured by the patterns of image and thought.

Coulehan’s poems are lyrical and his phrases are memorable. This is because the poet is attuned to the music of language. Listen to the pace and subtle harmonies of the lines that begin his family’s journey “Out of Ireland”: Martin carries a tin chest to the coast/during the worst year of famine, alone.” The poem concludes with this multilayered image:

At my journey’s end, a distracted priest driving a lawnmower repeats my name with moist lips. His stained, sweaty cassock, his thinning hair, the angel at Jesus’ grave—

The man you are looking for is not here.

The speaker uses a tone of tender intimacy in his favorite poems. In “The Exterior Palace,” I hear Mrs. Melville, who is “Dressed for cocktails at noon,” confiding in her physician, “we’ve got to get rid of that bitch of a nurse” as the nurse complains about the patient’s “noncompliance.”

The physician’s eyes come to rest on “six framed photos” of the patient smiling.

In another poem, the doctor gives the patient the standard directive “Take Off Your Clothes, ” so that “in a performance laden with gesture” he can read “a narrative in your flesh.”

I’d love to read a whole book of poems that have the passionate electricity of “Hands of Enchantment.” To be heard, to be seen, to be understood—I want him to be my doctor.

Coulehan learns “The Secret of the Care” “lies in caring/for the patient,” and his vision is compassionate.
In “Shall Inherit,” the physician treats the “gaunt” Kentucky children “With their small/serious eyes like coals...wearing the shrunken heads/of ancestors on their shoulders.”

Brazilian children smear themselves with “Cesium 137” from “an abandoned hospital site,” and they die “consumed by innocence/and radiant desire.”

When the visitor hears a chorus of children “playing instruments/with toes and prostheses,” at the “War Remnants Museum, Ho Chi Minh City,” he feels “an ingot of shame/in my heart.”

That same war blights the life of a childhood friend in “Poem for David.” A letter begging forgiveness for his “sick/activities last year,” and asking for pain medication, arrives on the same day his friend kills himself. The poet tells us, “I stood like wax/beside your open casket”:

...I hovered near the guttered flame
your father had become, recalling the months
you spent tending the wounded in Vietnam,
your endless shifts in hospitals back home.
I pictured forgiveness — an orchard
carpeted with apples, bruised and fallen.

Coming from authentic emotions, Coulehan’s poems speak to the reader’s emotions.

In “Phone Call from Alaska,” the daughter tells her father she was shot in the arm by a “random” bullet that came through the window of her basement apartment: “A scare, but no harm, you repeat/for the fifth time.”

The final poem, “Retrospective,” is based on 40 years of care. During this time, “His body replaced/its cells.”

The man who speaks in these poems has a generous imagination that encompasses the range of what it means to be human. He yearns to tip “toward happiness” the person undergoing a “Metamorphosis at Starbucks.”

The poems that frame this book are “On Reading Walt Whitman’s ‘The Wound-Dresser,’” and “Walt Whitman Reflects on His Doctor’s Bedside Manner.”

A physician-poet, Coulehan uses Whitman as his touchstone to guide him in delivering empathetic care, just as his hero ministered to Civil War soldiers.

If you treat yourself to some time with this excellent book, you will find, as Whitman writes in his own book, “Who touches this touches a man.”

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直到我读了《My Degeneration: A Journey Through Parkinson’s (Graphic Medicine)》这本书，我才开始对漫画书感兴趣。我认为漫画书是为孩子们准备的，或者为那些不能自我保护的超级英雄准备的。当病人无法从满是超级英雄的杂货店中摆脱时，你会感到奇怪。我本以为《My Degeneration》这本书会让读者对帕金森病有更多的了解，但我认为应该只专注于三个关键词：进步的，令人无法容忍的，令人难以忍受的。

在经历了最初的震惊和抑郁之后，他开始从事与这个不速之客有关的业务。《My Degeneration》是关于他的生活，以及一个有进步的，令人无法容忍的，令人难以忍受的疾病。

个人叙述的疾病已经成为非常流行的话题。它们现在构成了整个文学流派，有时被称为病理学。

我读过的某些病理学书籍写得既差又令人厌倦。其他人则提供了有用的信息，使读者能够了解所患同样疾病的人。
exposing arrogant physicians and medical mistakes, or touting the efficacy of alternative medicine. Only a few of these books are truly captivating. *My Degeneration* is one of them. Despite the ponderous subject, the book sparkles with intelligence and wit.

While *My Degeneration* covers the standard topics, its approach is different from most illness narratives. Words and images are not only complementary, but synergistic. As a cartoonist, Dunlap-Shohl has experience pairing incisive text with imaginative drawings. When he illustrates Parkinson’s disease as a huge green monster hovering over him in a dark room, or presents himself as a survivor drifting on a lifeboat constructed from folded newspaper, he evokes thoughts and emotions that text alone would be hard-pressed to convey.

The book is humorous, sometimes laugh-out-loud funny. It might be difficult to imagine a “journey through Parkinson’s” having such a light touch. The author is able to distance himself and approach his catastrophic illness as just another scene in the human comedy, as Balzac or Chekhov would have put it—an obstacle to be encountered, understood, and then overcome.

In the first chapter, “Diagnosis Blues,” the author’s depression leads him to contemplate suicide. He imagines a creative suicide, death-by-bear—jogging into the woods and getting mauled by an Alaskan brown bear. The image of the terrified author screaming, “AAAA…,” as he runs from an imagined bear is very funny. Yet, the whole sequence conveys a serious message, “knowing there was a back exit was one of the things that got me through the early months.”

The author demonstrates his ability to take an ironic perspective on supposedly serious research. He tells his wife about a research study that suggested Parkinson’s patients are more honest, industrious, altruistic, and clean than “normal” people. In response, his wife muses that perhaps “dysfunction of the brain makes us better people.” The author then queries himself, “Since Parkinson’s is progressive, will I get...more honest? Altruistic? Clean? Industrious?”

*My Degeneration* has a concise and creative way it provides factual information, for example, a graphic illustration of Parkinson’s pathophysiology, and an introduction to deep brain stimulation therapy.

In the chapter “Moping and Coping,” Dunlap-Shohl discusses the “off” phenomenon, in which medications suddenly lose their effect, and Parkinson’s patients are literally stuck, unable to move. He reports that sometimes
individuals can get moving again by trying to walk backwards, rather than forwards. On the next page, he offers an illustrated list of six techniques that patients might use to abort an “off” episode.\footnote{p35}

While the author is sometimes discouraged, sometimes depressed, the overall message of his story is life-affirming. His initial depression resolves when a very buff spandex angel appears to him and proclaims, “Fear not! Though thou walk through the valley of Parkinson’s, thou art not entirely helpless!”\footnote{p14}

Throughout the book he overcomes setbacks. He learns to adapt in ways that allow him to continue a happy and productive life. In one of the final chapters, he recalls the image of his spandex angel, noting that “there are now numerous studies that confirm the wisdom of the angel’s words.”\footnote{p84} He reviews the value of bicycling, yoga, tai chi, and even videogames (virtual boxing), in maintaining motor skills. He fanaticizes an actual boxing match with Parkinson’s disease, no longer the huge green monster from the first chapter, but now a flabby opponent in the ring, whom he promptly knocks out.

*My Degeneration* will be an invaluable resource for those struggling with Parkinson’s disease, their families, and for medical, nursing, and physical therapy professionals who care for patients suffering from Parkinson’s and other progressive neurological disorders.

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**Pulse—voices from the heart of medicine: Editors’ Picks**

Paul Gross, MD, Diane Guemsey, Johanna Shapiro, PhD, Judy Schaefer, RNC, MA
Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2016, 272 pages

Reviewed by Jack Coulehan, MD (ΩA, University of Pittsburgh, 1969)

Literally, a pulse means the rhythmic throbbing of arteries as ventricular contraction propels blood through the body. However, the word has many connotations, each evoking life, energy, and movement.

In 2008, when Paul Gross, and his colleagues in the Department of Family and Social Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, decided to create an ezine (electronic magazine) that tells “the story of health care through the personal experiences of those who live it,” they chose *Pulse* as the name for their publication, reflecting the vibrancy of “voices from the heart of medicine.” Since then, *Pulse* has grown from a few dozen subscribers (it’s free, by the way) to more than 10,000. Appearing weekly,
Pulse (at pulsevoices.org) features the stories, poems, and personal reflections of patients, health professionals, students, and caregivers.

In Pulse: Voices From the Heart of Medicine, their third anthology, editors Paul Gross and Diane Guernsey present a remarkable sample of pieces that have appeared in Pulse during a three year period—2011 through 2013. I use the word “remarkable” advisedly, although I could just as well replace it with “engaging” or “provocative,” which are also on target. Limited to 1,000 words or less, these tales draw us into the experiential world of health care, and allow us to take its pulse.

Some stories are about patients, and/or their family members. In “Shujinwa Byoki Des” (Japanese for “My husband is sick”), Lucy Moore tells of her husband’s acute illness while on a vacation in Japan. p5 When he becomes violently ill with high fever and rash they rush to a hospital where they are astonished by the deep respect physicians and nurses show them, despite language and cultural barriers. In gestures and broken English, the staff is able to convey “a sense of shared responsibility” throughout the five day hospitalization, which includes numerous tests and interventions. And, the final cost is only $3,500 (U.S. currency)!

Steven Lewis, in “Desperately Seeking Herb Weinman,” p164 tells of his visit to an emergency room for persistent chest pain. As he lies on a narrow gurney feeling lonely and ignored he yearns for the warmth of his old family doctor, long since retired. He finds the hospital staff “not disrespectful or callous or incompetent. But to them I (am) little more than what appeared on a computer screen.” In the end, he is relieved that his chest pain wasn’t caused by a heart attack, and, yet, he feels that something is missing.

We hear the voices of health care professionals like Anne K. Merritt, who reflects on her emergency medicine residency in “One Hundred Wiser.” p22 At first, she approaches each shift with excitement, anticipating a novel learning experience, like her first intubation or first placement of an arterial line. As these procedures became routine, her patients come more clearly into focus as individuals. The initial adrenalin rush subsides, and she learns to “face and feel my patients’ pain and vulnerability and my own.”

Priscilla Mainardi gives us a glimpse of a hospital nurse’s day in “Nineteen Steps.” p14 When she begins her shift, she has seven tasks on her to-do list; by midday the list has increased to 26. Each nurse on the unit depends on a personal coping mechanism, Priscilla’s is counting her steps. Her story focuses on Mrs. Napoli, a “wisp of an old woman,” who is terminally ill. When Mrs. Napoli begins to cry, Priscilla walks 19 steps to the utility room to get her a box of tissues, and then, despite her long list of pressing tasks, she sits down to spend time with Mrs. Napoli.

The poems in Pulse tend to be miniature stories that arise from sudden, incongruous moments of insight. Tabor Flickinger’s “In Line at the Hospital Coffee Stand” p111 gives insight to the voices of hospital personnel making momentous comments in a mundane setting—“Oh, did you take care of him before? He’s dead.”

“Catching Chickens,” by Daniel Klawitter p97 depicts a moment, “my grandmother/was trying to catch an imaginary chicken/on her deathbed.” When the grandson tries to console her with, “I caught the chicken for you./You can rest now,” she cries, “No you did NOT!” The poet concludes:

I guess we all have to catch our own chickens, before we cross the road and reach that other side.

Dr. Alan Blum’s (AΩA, Emory University, 1985 Alumnus) drawings are among the best features of this anthology. For many years, Blum, a family physician and professor of family medicine at the University of Alabama, has been sketching portraits of his patients, usually as a result of a particularly quotable comment they made. The editors have scattered 12 of Blum’s portraits throughout the book, like tiny facets of the human comedy. On one of the first pages, we see a bemused woman looking downward, holding her forehead, and saying, “You think you got a medicine to stop my seizures? I don’t know why, it’s the only exercise I get.”

Later, an elderly woman complains from her wheelchair, “Doctor told me I need an autopsy, but I said I wanted to wait.” p208.

There is one problem with Pulse: Voices From the Heart of Medicine, the pieces are so engaging you want to keep reading and reading. I’d advise trying to slow down and savor each story, poem, and drawing.

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