

BOOK REVIEW

The Art of Medicine in Metaphors: A Collection of Poems and Narratives

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*The Art of Medicine in Metaphors: A Collection
of Poems and Narratives*

James Borton and Brandi Ballard (Eds.)

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Surely there is a place in our lives for fiction and fantasy (who doesn't like a saucy myth now and then?) But too much of fiction can be too distancing, so unreal as to be impossible to interpret. A corrective for such unreality is for writers to contend with the subtleties of their real lives, relying on actual moments retold through artistic means. Such creativity abounds in *The Art of Medicine in Metaphors*, which is a fine collection of artfully retold life-changing health events, impossible to ignore. The text should be of interest to medical professionals and caregivers as well as creative writers seeking to understand the human, personal dimen-

sions of modern medical dilemmas. Given the opportunity, how do patients reveal their own medical narratives?

The book includes over seventy creative writings from a wide array of medical professionals, teachers, patients and their family members. He served as editor: James Borton, the college teacher and writer, who began to explore creative responses to illness following his own health crisis.

Most of the texts are feverishly autobiographical, and rooted in documenting the author's responses to health's decay or renewal. Herein we find emphases on direct truths. Examples include Brandi Ballard's "Dust and Ashes," which finishes its meditation on the death of an uncle with a family argument, finding common ground only in an image of passing "What they do agree on was the way his ashes swirled and spiraled down to the ground before dissipating." Another honesty is within "Showdown" by Selena Larkin, when she states her resigning acceptance of her father's wishes

that he no longer be disturbed: "My compliance will always feel numb." Similarly, many of the writings fly in the face of stereotypes of mere acceptance of health conditions, often reacting against the clarity of various medical tests, numeric analyses, and necessary clinical detachments -- as important as they are -- with the idiosyncratic dialogues and feelings of the authors.

While we cannot expect amateur writers to craft their work like celebrity poet laureates, more than a few of the writings move beyond bluntness and towards the fullness of the craft of writing. "Another Reason to be Pleasant" by Sam Watson certainly achieves this, and it was a good read, humanizing the surgical theatre. In fact the entire collection of writings is rather stunning, rooted in the depth of each writer's honesty.

Gregory Scheckler, Professor of Art at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. When not teaching, writing or painting, Prof. Scheckler can often be found hiking, biking or skiing in New England. He resides in Williamstown, MA. For examples of his paintings please see website <http://www.gregscheckler.com>