

Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
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**A Knowable World**

By Sarah Wardle.
Bloodaxe Books. 2009.
£7.95 (pb). 64pp.
ISBN: 9781852248192

In 1837 John Clare was admitted to High Beach Asylum, Epping Forest, where he remained until July 1841 when he escaped and walked 80 miles back home to Northborough, surviving by 'eating grass by the roadside'. This experience was described in his prose piece *Journey out of Essex*. It is as vivid an account of absconding from an asylum as any. In *A Knowable World*, a new volume of poetry by Sarah Wardle, the author also describes in four vivid lines how she 'fled the clinic/escaping through a narrow bathroom window/shoeless . . .' (p. 18). Sarah Wardle's poetry is an act of courage, for she examines her own incarceration, madness, abnormal experiences and treatment with brutal yet endearing honesty. In 'Unnatural justice' she writes about her contact with the police:

They arrest you . . .

and six of them push you down on a mat
and twist your arms behind your back,
and that, Ladies and Gentlemen, is justice,
as delivered by the Police so-called service (p. 23)

This poem recalls Robert Lowell's poem 'Visitors' in which he too describes his contact with the police, remarking 'They are fat beyond the call of duty', an indirect comment on the excesses that he experienced. Aside from Clare and Lowell, naturally, Wardle's poetry calls to mind other poets who like her have suffered psychiatric illnesses, including Elizabeth Jennings and Ivor Gurney.

There are a number of love poems here, addressed to her psychiatrist. In 'Trust Core Values' she writes

The consultant psychiatrist is on the ward.
In his proximity, all is hope with the world . . .

even when love is not returned,
since his Scottish blue eyes are a beacon,
which simultaneously dispel and beckon (p. 38)

And in another poem 'Psychiatrists Ask Questions' she wrote

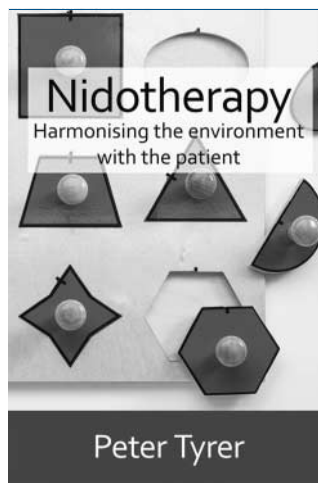
Just as Hume questioned if the sun won't rise,
may I ask you, though you cannot reply
due to your strict professionalism,
what if there'd been light this side of heaven
and I had been given another life?
Might I have borne your bairns and been your wife (p. 42)

These poems remind us of the human dimension of mental illness, if we should need reminding. Wardle's gift is to have retained her

observant eye and poetic sensibility when her reason and humours were assailed by illness. Her poems are worthy additions to the body of literature by writers speaking out of the experience of disquiet.

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**Nidotherapy. Harmonising the Environment with the Patient**

By Peter Tyrer.
RCPsych Publications. 2009.
£10.00 (pb). 112pp.
ISBN: 9781904671749

I have the privilege of working in a research-friendly service. As a result, my patients have benefited from a wide range of innovative therapies in their earliest stages of development. Some have flattered to deceive – compliance therapy comes to mind; some have prospered mightily – cognitive therapy for psychosis being an obvious example (though if Tyrer is to be believed, this too may be due a re-evaluation); and some have had a hard grind to achieve recognition (cognitive rehabilitation is a good example).

I have yet to have any direct experience of nidotherapy, a coinage from the Latin that we are told means 'nest' therapy – though my Latin dictionary has the more evocative and perhaps appropriate word 'haunt' as the preferred translation. The 'i' is, by the way, long – as in ice-cream as opposed to nit. The question this short book begs is whether nidotherapy will move from its current niche (a cognate word, we are told), as a project based on particular enthusiasm, to more general application.

There is a deep humanity in this book, which begins with a rather moving prologue describing the interaction between Robert Cawley, a psychiatrist who was in my early years a slightly scary but very supportive professor, and Janet Frame, an author who had come very close to having a prefrontal leucotomy. Nidotherapy is, according to Tyrer, 'a treatment born of despair and desperation'. Perhaps treatment is not quite the correct word, because the essence of nidotherapy, captured in the book's subtitle, is working with the patient to change their environment to make a better fit between them and their world.

Predictably, the book is clearly written, well-structured and gives a good account of what the aspiring nidotherapist might actually do, using clinical vignettes and exercises (the answers are provided in an appendix) to get the message home. Readers are taken through the four stages of nidotherapy: environmental analysis; making the nidotherapy pathway; initiating change; and long-term planning. Whether the intellectual argument for nidotherapy as a specifically new intervention is made is a moot point – the skilled mental health practitioner has always been