



columns

Sir Martin Roth

Martin Roth was the most respected and the most successful psychiatrist of his generation. He was born into an orthodox Jewish family in Budapest, Hungary, on 6 November 1917. In 1925 the family moved to London where his father, a cantor, had accepted a position in a synagogue in the East End.

Roth attended the Davenant Foundation School, famed for educating talented boys, mainly Jewish, who went on to become professionals; the majority became doctors. Roth was an excellent example of the school's success, not only scholastically, but also musically; he showed, as a mere boy, his talent as a pianist, a talent he exhibited and enjoyed throughout his life.

Roth opted for medicine and was given a place at St Mary's Medical School, Paddington, where he qualified MBBS (Lond) in 1942. Thereafter, with exemplary speed, he added to this the MRCP (Lond) and MD (Lond). By that time he had decided that neurology was to be his metier, but he was so impressed by the teachings of one of his mentors, Lord Russell Brain, that he felt compelled to change tack and decided to become a psychiatrist rather than a neurologist.

To this end, he went to the Maudsley Hospital, the Mecca of academic psychiatry in the UK. He was chosen as senior registrar to Professor Sir Aubrey Lewis but, sadly, the two, both of them intellectual Titans, proved to be incompatible and Roth quit the Maudsley prematurely.

His next stop was at the Crichton Hospital, Dumfries, Scotland, where Professor Mayer-Gross, an eminent refugee from Nazi Germany and a teacher and friend from the Maudsley, was the Director of Research. In the relaxed atmosphere of the Crichton, Roth found an opportunity to study, reflect and write. But of most importance was the invitation to join Mayer-Gross and Eliot Slater in writing a new, comprehensive textbook of psychiatry, entitled simply *Textbook of Clinical Psychiatry*. It was a huge success and became the standard work world-wide. It was translated into five languages and ran to three editions, the last written mainly by Roth himself.

Next on the list of his postings was as Director of Clinical Research at Graylingwell Hospital, Sussex. Here, *inter alia*, he continued what had become his major preoccupation, namely, the differentiation and classification of mental diseases, mainly those associated with old age.

Then, what was to be a benchmark in his career, in the mid 1950s came recognition by the scientific and psychiatric community of the real worth of Roth as thinker, philosopher and, particularly, as a researcher. Prestigious jobs and important invitations to speak at universities and

institutions poured in from all over the globe. Glittering honours and prizes were showered on him; suddenly, the world was his oyster.

First in the academic queue was an invitation in 1956 to become Clinical Professor and Head of Psychiatry at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Under his leadership, the department blossomed and became recognised as one of the leaders in the field. It is no coincidence that during his tenure at Newcastle, Roth was created Knight of the British Empire. But the honour he cherished most was his election in 1996 to the Royal Society.

There was yet another even more prestigious academic honour. In 1976, he became the first Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge. As he had done in the past, he succeeded in building up a highly successful centre for research, but on this occasion from scratch.

In 1985, Roth retired from his Cambridge chair but this did not stop him working. Far from it; he continued to further his researches as before, until, in his eighties, the signs and symptoms of his final illness called a halt.

There is one other triumph to record, one totally unconnected with the intricacies of research: he was elected the first President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He took up his duties in 1972, duties that were concerned with administration, politics and finance, most of them new to him. None the less, he mastered them all brilliantly and with panache. Today, the College is in fine fettle, far removed from the puny, puking infant left behind by its precursor, the old Royal Medico-Psychological Association in 1972. A good deal of its robust growth is due to Sir Martin Roth's expert early nurture. The College is, and always will be, a monument to his skill.

Sir Martin Roth died, aged 88, at Cambridge on 26 September 2006. He leaves behind him his devoted wife Constance, three talented daughters and nine grandchildren, not forgetting a host of friends, colleagues and ex-pupils.

Henry R. Rollin

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Address given at the memorial service for Professor Sir Martin Roth at Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge on 20 January 2007

Amidst the beautiful readings and prayers today and after Fauré's Sanctus, it is a daunting task to have to speak in plain speech. We will shortly hear the sublime

words of the Jewish Memorial Prayer to set before the God of mercy and compassion 'all the meritorious and pious deeds which Martin did on earth'. This is a man who, among his meritorious deeds, had at the age of 37 published a textbook which defined psychiatry for a generation, at 42 had helped to work out the World Health Organization (WHO) classification of psychiatric disorders, at 49 had worked out the pathological basis of dementia, at 54 was elected first President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and was honoured with a knighthood at 55.

Many would have been proud of any one of these as their lifetime's achievement. Was there anything left for him to do after that? He went on to become Foundation Professor of Psychiatry at Cambridge and a Fellow of Trinity College at 60. And then, in his late 60s, he went on to help work out the molecular basis of Alzheimer's disease and the theoretical basis of a treatment, and was honoured again by election as a Fellow of the Royal Society at 79.

I should simply fall silent in gratitude for the privilege of having accompanied such a man as a pupil, colleague and friend for the past 25 years. It is only friendship and love which give me the audacity to speak, and I do so on behalf of us all. Here, we are all drawn together for a moment in love, friendship, collegiality and admiration, united in the face of that leveller of all human achievement, death. There is an almost animal instinct at work here, that draws us together to share our sense of loss, for some of a husband/father/grandfather, for some of a colleague or teacher, for some their physician, and for some just a friend. Yet we are to come away with an ability to let go, and for the sense of loss to be transformed into joy and celebration at having enjoyed the gift of such a man among us, that we had a share in his full life, a life well lived and well spent, the good life of a good man.

The family asks us to consider Sir Martin's life as laid down in Ecclesiasticus. 'Treat the physician with honour', we are told, 'because we have need of him, and because his gift comes from the Most High.' We are told that 'God gave skill to men that He (God) might be glorified in His marvellous works.'

Sir Martin fulfilled the type of the good physician. I particularly remember an occasion when I was training, and he helped me with the assessment of a dishevelled, filthy schizophrenic woman. He spoke to her with such extraordinary kindness and respect for her person, I should actually say with such love, compassion and understanding for her pain, that I was deeply moved by what I saw. Because we are frail and afraid, may we all fall when we have need into the hands of a good physician, just such as Sir Martin was.



The poems the family has chosen to read emphasise beauty, which 'will never pass into nothingness', and love, which 'lives beyond the tomb'. They are telling us through these verses the essence of what Sir Martin was to them, and to me in his work and in friendship. They are telling us that it is these qualities (his high sense of the loveliness of things, of the duty of compassion for those who suffer, of the need for fundamental integrity and loyalty in one's dealings) that were the bedrock of what he was. In a way, they are also telling us that these are the lasting things. When I conjure up Sir Martin in my mind, these are the qualities I have the clearest sense of, that gave him such loveliness as a man.

But let us turn to the physician's more objective skills. He had chosen to study medicine before he left school, and did so at St Mary's Hospital in London both as student and as house officer. It was the distinguished neurologist, Sir Russell, later Lord Brain at the Maida Vale Hospital, who helped direct his brilliant young senior registrar into his life's path, not in neurology but in psychiatry. Sir Martin always retained a deep respect and affection for Brain, that I share in my turn for Sir Martin, as befits that wise and good teacher who helps one discover one's mission in life. His higher training, which he had completed by 33, was at the Maida Vale and Maudsley Hospitals in London, and then the Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries.

The very first papers he wrote, towards the end of his training, were to define immediately two of the fundamental themes of his life's work. The first dealt with the interplay between clinical picture, history and heredity in reaching the correct diagnosis and classification of mental illness. 'Correct classification is the first step towards understanding causation,' he would say. The next expressed what was to be his lifelong interest in anxiety and depression.

During his first substantive post, where he stayed for 5 years at the Graylingwell Hospital in Chichester, he began to lay the foundations of what was to be his main scientific contribution to psychiatry. Having understood that the diagnosis and classification of mental disorders in the elderly was in a state of confusion riddled with empty generalities, he formulated a fivefold classification which still stands today. He showed that Alzheimer's disease and dementia due to strokes were distinct from the other three classes on account of rapid mental decline and high death rate. The prevailing psychiatric wisdom, expressed in the ragbag concept of 'senile psychosis', which carries the implication that you become mad simply through becoming old, was therefore false.

The seeds of his textbook were also planted very early on. He had trained at the Maudsley with Eliot Slater, a brilliant and creative psychiatrist with a strong respect for the empirical sciences, and for statistics in particular, acquired from his teacher at St John's, the eminent statistician R. A. Fisher. At the Crichton, he had trained with Willi Mayer-Gross, a refugee from Nazi Germany who brought with him a deep understanding of the rich psychiatric phenomenology of the pre-war German tradition. Mayer-Gross and Slater invited the young Martin Roth at the age of 32 to join them in the preparation of an entirely new comprehensive *Textbook of Clinical Psychiatry*. The aim was to combine both the Slater and the Mayer-Gross strands to achieve a new synthesis in the face of the prevailing Freudian orthodoxy. It took them 5 years to complete this monumental task. The result was a brilliant success. The first edition appeared in 1954 when Sir Martin was aged 37, and it continued with new editions and revisions until 1977, and was translated into Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese and American. This textbook set a stamp on British psychiatry for 30 years. It was written with immense erudition and humanity, and an underlying hunger to achieve a coherent scientific understanding of the nature of mental illness.

From the textbook and his research came fame and influence. After appointment as Professor of Psychological Medicine at Newcastle at the age of 39, the Chair he was to occupy for 21 years, he set about creating one of the strongest psychiatric research departments in the country. At aged 42 he began his work with the WHO, contributing over time to the creation of the ICD classification system of psychiatric disorders, and then to the standard diagnostic system of US psychiatry, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). At 47 he was appointed as a member of the Medical Research Council, where he used his influence to help develop psychiatric research throughout the country.

He worked for 10 years to help create the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which was established in 1971. His contribution was recognised by his election as the first President of the College. We gain a sense of his personal charisma and charm when we picture him, having won over the then Minister of Health, Keith Joseph, and with the help of Lord Goodman, and a substantial gift from Marks and Spencer Trusts, raising sufficient funds to acquire a property in Belgrave Square, SW1, which still remains the home of the College. The College accreditation system, both of psychiatrists and psychiatric hospitals, became a powerful engine for raising and maintaining professional standards throughout the country. His research,

scholarship and contributions to psychiatry were recognised by the knighthood awarded to him in 1972 at the age of 55.

I will not go on to detail all his further research and the many honours he received. If you read his curriculum vitae, there are two pages of mostly one-per-line listings of his academic, professional and civic honours. We were told in Ecclesiasticus that 'The skill of the physician lifts up his head, and in the presence of great men he is admired,' and Sir Martin was indeed very much honoured and much admired.

Two years after his period as College President ended, at the age of 60, he decided to start a new life, as the Foundation Professor of Psychiatry at the new School of Clinical Medicine in Cambridge. Here he plunged himself into scholarship, writing and research. This was a golden time in his life, when he was at the pinnacle of his intellectual powers and eminence, which I shared with him as his PhD student from 1981. He was immensely proud of the work we did together on Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer had discovered a lesion in the brain which he called the neurofibrillary tangle, and from this the disease is called 'Alzheimer's disease'. From his seminal research in Newcastle, Sir Martin established a correlation between the load of Alzheimer's tangles in the brain and the degree of clinical dementia. From this correlation, he became convinced that understanding Alzheimer's tangle held the key to developing a treatment.

The real crux of the matter, as Sir Martin used to say, was to 'seize the tangle by the throat'. To this end, he enlisted the help of Sir Aaron Klug, and I was summarily dispatched to the Laboratory of Molecular Biology to solve the problem of Alzheimer's tangle. With colleagues there it took us 5 years to work this out, and then another 7 years to work out the theoretical basis of a treatment.

But research of the kind Sir Martin wanted needs much more than a spot of good luck at the laboratory bench. He was after the big game: finding a treatment based on Alzheimer's tangle. In the event, bringing Sir Martin's dream to fruition has needed £25 million to be raised, not in a highly risk-averse UK investment environment, but in Singapore, setting up a research group of some 70 people, and for me a PhD project lasting 25 years. By a curious providence, the data from our first clinical trial of some 200 participants are to be unmasked in just a few weeks time; 25 years on, I will finally get to learn whether Sir Martin's basic intuition was right or wrong. The sadness is that he will not be with us now either to share the exhilaration if it works, or help pick up the pieces if it doesn't.



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Sir Martin taught by his own life and example how to forge the new in the face of entrenched opinion and opposition. I would often come away from discussions with him which began in darkness and despondency, seeing again more clearly what the real business of academic psychiatry and discovery is, why it is good, why it must be done. Sir Martin was not overtly religious and would not have put it as we have heard it today, but in fact he was teaching day by day that 'healing comes from the Most High', that 'The Lord created medicines from the earth . . . to heal and take away pain', that 'He gave skill to men that He might be glorified in his works'. But he taught this, not in sweetness and light, but by bitter

struggle and a fundamental mental toughness. He too had to encounter many bitter opponents, and also the thieves and free-riders who are hungry for easy money or recognition. He taught that we have no choice but to find the courage, tenacity and mental toughness to advance directly into enemy fire.

I will conclude with a cartoon drawn by a gifted illustrator in the Laboratory of Molecular Biology. It was commissioned and inspired by our colleague, Elizabeta Mukaetova-Ladinska on the occasion of Sir Martin's 75th birthday. It shows Sir Martin on horseback with a very determined look on his face, setting off out of the castle into the unknown. Elizabeta is shown as the distressed damsel behind

him on the horse. In front to the left, there is Charles Harrington in a kilt piping us out, ever the loyal and stalwart companion, and to the right, there is me, a monk, carrying a sort of misshapen tau cross with dead rats dangling from it, looking very worried and uncertain. On Sir Martin's shield is the device 'Cerebrum Magnum'. The caption reads 'The quest for the gold brain begins!' The crowd in the castle are all shouting 'Hooray for Sir Martin!'. And so do I too conclude Hooray, Hooray and again Hooray for Sir Martin!

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