Feature Pieces

The Stricklands, J. Court; Remembering the Clarke, D. Frayn; The Book of Negroes, L. Hill
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Anton Chekhov’s *Ward Six* deceptively begins as a quaint description of a small hospital annex, where five patients in blue hospital dressing gowns wear old-fashioned nightcaps and sit or lie on beds screwed to the floor. We soon discover that the patients are “lunatics” and that the annex is a mental asylum. Dr. Ragin, the aloof asylum doctor, later wrestles with the riddle of mental illness and suffering: “If the aim of the medical profession was to alleviate suffering by the administration of medicine, the question inevitably arose: why alleviate suffering? For in the first place it was argued that man could only achieve perfection through suffering, and secondly, if mankind really learnt to alleviate suffering by pills and drops it would give up religion and philosophy, in which it had hitherto found not only protection from all misfortunes but even happiness.” Dr. Ragin argues with Gromov, his patient, “Once prisons and lunatic asylums exist, there must be someone to be there. If it’s not you, it’s me: if it’s not me, then it’s someone else. Have patience—when in the faraway future prisons and lunatic asylums cease to exist, there won’t be any more barred windows or hospital gowns. Such a time will of course come, sooner or later.” Written over a century ago, Chekov’s central character, Dr. Ragin, grows closer to the pain and suffering of his patients, falls ill, and becomes a patient. He eventually dies on Ward Six.

Chekhov’s narrative of illness and health remains an open question for the present. In this issue of *Ars Medica*, our first section is devoted to the centenary of the Department of Psychiatry at University of Toronto. John Court, archivist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, opens a window on the history of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, which was created on reforms of “moral treatment” from France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. His piece vividly illustrates hospital life through the eyes of William Strickland, head gardener at Queen Street Asylum in 1895, who worked closely with hospital patients in his
gardens. Charles K. Clarke (1857–1824), the first professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto (and a somewhat controversial figure), was responsible for bringing one of the first psychoanalysts, Ernest Jones, to Toronto in 1909. Three quarters of a century later the psychiatric hospital moved outside its walls to the community and the Clarke Institute was constructed. Douglas Frayn, a past out-patient director, writes of that time where, unlike Ward Six, there was “considerable optimism for psychiatry and the future.”

Exploring the impact and stigma of mental and physical illness through art, medicine, and the humanities is a central and defining theme for Ars Medica. Another recurring theme in the many works we receive concerns power, exploitation, and subjugation by one group (or individual) over another. Ars Medica is indebted to Canadian author and recipient of the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize 2008, Lawrence Hill, who brings the historic oppression of slavery into a clear literary focus in an excerpt from The Book of Negroes. Aminata Diallo, speaks of her kidnapping from her West-African homeland, her many losses, and her survival in a foreign land. “There must be a reason why I have lived in all these lands, survived all those water crossings, while others fell from bullets or shut their eyes and simply willed their lives to end.”

Tales of survival in the face of suffering are present in many of our stories and poems, albeit in different forms and art. The celebrated Canadian First Nations artist Robert Houle reminds us, in his smallpox collage, that biological warfare was promoted by a white (and historically revered) British General. In the “Wong-Baker Scale”—an actual medical facial-pain rating scale used for patients—Gina Vozenilek writes of anxious domesticity in a medical household and contemplates Victor Hugo’s aphorism, “Pain is as diverse as man. One suffers as one can.” In “Sunday Nights at the Shangri-La,” Cindy Dale sets her sombre tale of grief in a suicide survivors’ chat room. Nigel Leaney’s “Hope from a Distance” offers a moving story of two brothers, the elder suffering from tormenting voices and recurrent hospitalizations, the younger suffering the burden of fraternal care. In the “Eighth Day” Michael McConnell narrates his recovery from the paralysis of Guillain-Barré syndrome, leaving the reader to wonder how he willed “the wretched disease to leave me alone forever.”
In our Creative Process section, Arthur Robinson Williams, a third-year medical student, uses the art of photography to reflect “additional layers to lived representation and the embodiment of the Self.” Using his work with “trans folks”—transgendered, transsexual, and gender-variant individuals—Williams bravely explores the enigmatic tension between the body and the inner core of subjective experience.

In its diverse poems, historical essays, personal narratives, images, and stories, Ars Medica seeks to offer a place of reflection and dialogue with the other about our presence. As Ann Enright, the Irish writer and 2007 Booker Prize winner recently said, “I write about the passage of life from ease to unease to disease.” Her comment applies not only to the current of words and images, but to the ebb and flow of shared and transmitted personal experience in our collective journey.
The Stricklands: Living and Working at Queen Street a Century Ago

John P. M. Court

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) was formed in 1998 under the Ontario Public Hospitals Act, based on provincial recommendations for merging two mental health and two addiction specialty institutions.

Queen Street Mental Health Centre (QSMHC) had by then been serving the province for almost a century and a half. After the 1840s decade of temporary asylum facilities, the Provincial Lunatic Asylum (as it was known until 1871) opened with public optimism in 1850 on what is still CAMH’s present and future hub location. Located on fifty acres within the pastoral military reserve, and monumentally designed on a mammoth scale with advanced residential features, the asylum drew upon reforms from France, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. “moral treatment” movement. By 1998, Ontario’s largest psychiatric hospital led with a strong community focus on treatment of chronic and serious mental illnesses. At the merger, Queen Street was providing clinical training to more than six hundred students in medicine, nursing, rehabilitation, psychology, recreation therapy, and social work. Working with some 150 community-based agencies to assist clients with their housing, income support, vocational training, rehab, and other requirements, QSMHC had 1,030 staff (full-time, part-time, and medical) and an operating budget of $64 million.
A nursing supervisor and students with their patients in the women's medical infirmary at Queen Street, about 1910

The ornamental fountain and front gardens at Queen Street, late 1800s, by the renowned photographer Frank Micklethwaite
William Strickland was presented with this wicker chair by his colleagues about 1920 as a token of their friendship and esteem.

The younger Strickland daughter, Alfie ca. 1909, behind the Asylum’s East Gate Lodge, their family residence

A century earlier, when the Strickland family arrived to live and work on the grounds during the thirty years of Superintendent Daniel Clark, fresh air and exercise were considered more beneficial for mental health than many other asylums’ invasive physical procedures and over-reliance on chemicals. Moral therapy continued to foster recreation and work regimens for patients, which were also intended to instill post-discharge working skills and confidence. This was, however, a controversial practice; patients worked for no pay. Patients’ labour saved the provincial government, which mandated this practice, enormous expenses in numerous categories, such as clothing, made by women, and grounds maintenance and construction work by male patients. Some results of these labours can still be admired. The boundary walls along the east, west, and south perimeters of CAMH reflect the skills of the nineteenth-century patients who from 1860 helped in building and later reassembling them.
William Strickland transferred to Queen Street as head gardener in 1895, nurturing a wide variety of plants and flowers in the greenhouse while caring for the outdoor flowerbeds. In winter he tended coal fires to prevent the plants from freezing. The Stricklands lived on the grounds in the East Gate Lodge, where their second daughter, Alfie, was born in 1899. William Strickland worked closely with the hospital patients who helped him in the gardens and grounds, while his family became friends with many of them. A poem, “Alfie’s Pets,” was written for her as a gift from John M. in 1910.

About 1920, William Strickland transferred from Queen Street to the Mimico (later renamed Lakeshore) provincial hospital. His colleagues presented him with a wicker chair as a token of their long friendship and warm esteem for him. Mr. Strickland continued caring for the gardens and grounds of the spacious Mimico facility until he retired in 1924.
Further Reading
University of Toronto Department of Psychiatry. “Historical Vignettes for the Centenary.” http://www.utpsychiatry.ca/centenary/#July-07-Wasylenki-Vig1-Pre-1907.

Historian John Court is archivist for CAMH and assistant professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto. He extends his sincere appreciation to the Strickland descendants, especially Frances Charlton and Lois Nicholson.
FRONT COVER: 1868 front view of the Provincial Asylum in Toronto, silver albumen print reproduced as a postcard by the renowned nineteenth-century Canadian photographer William Notman, and his Toronto partner John A. Fraser

Toronto Reference Library, Baldwin Room, and CAMH Archives

BACK COVER: An 1890 bird’s-eye perspective in ink and watercolour on paper of the Provincial Asylum, by William James Thomson. A sketch version originally appeared as an illustration in the Toronto Globe, 5 April 1890.

Collection of the CAMH Archives