


pseudoscience that underpins the trauma industry and the resultant thoughtless 'quick-fixes' from many who ought to know better.

The atrocities she describes are apocalyptic in both scale and terror. In them, she endures personal hardships: living without running water, without electricity, yet aware of her privileged status, her passport, her choice to be there, her safe home in the UK. Jones is repeatedly drawn back to disaster scenes, not because of their horrors, but because, 'I hope,' she says, 'that some [of their courage] will rub off on me'. In retelling these stories from her long humanitarian career, she passes some of that courage to her readers. Her beautifully weft stories of a lone psychiatrist bearing children's unbearable burdens are beacons of hope to their bomb-shattered childhoods and to our broken world.

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### Declaration of interest

In 2014, Jones and I were coincidentally participants on a memoir writing course run by the Guardian Newspaper. We have not remained in contact and she does not know I have read her book.

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### Student Mental Health: A Guide for Psychiatrists, Psychologists, and Leaders Serving in Higher Education

Edited by Laura Weiss Roberts. American Psychiatric Association. 2018. 530 pp. £41.40 (pb). ISBN 9781615371143

This is a comprehensive resource for professionals working with students in higher education. Subsections of the book address in turn the student experience, caring for students with mental health issues and how to foster mental health in distinct student populations. The book takes an academically robust approach to supporting student self-care, wellbeing and development of resilience.

Individual chapters go on to address key presentations around substance misuse, suicidality, mood and anxiety disorders, psychotic illness, autism, ADHD, trauma, sleep and eating disorders. There is also an important focus upon the role of university mental health services for students who have faced sexual violence, those from military backgrounds and first generation university attenders, as well as students identifying as part of the LGBTQ community. It is in the last chapter where the challenges for 'medical students, residents

and fellows' are explored, albeit somewhat briefly. The writers identify the unique stressors for this group and reflect upon the obstacles to seeking help such as stigma and confidentiality. It is noteworthy that all medical students in the American system are postgraduate and therefore usually older than British students, most of whom enter medical school straight from sixth form/college and are less prepared for the expectations of professionalism at this early stage of their development.

Although written from the perspective of the American educational system, in general the content is still eminently transferrable to UK institutions. Throughout the book, its contributors make few assumptions as to prior knowledge, detailing everything from the risk-taking behaviours that develop during 'emerging adulthood' to the descriptive psychopathology for different major mental illnesses. Each chapter's utilisation of 'key concept' bullet points and case examples further increase its accessibility to the reader.

Ultimately the book makes recommendations not only on how student health programmes can achieve excellence by successfully managing students with major mental illness, but also on how all students can be supported to reach their full potential. It is a valuable resource for teachers in higher education.

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### The Whisperer

By Karin Fossum  
Harvill Secker Imprint. 2018. £12.99 (pb). 384 pp.  
ISBN 9781787300941

How can we understand psychosis without experiencing it ourselves? How can we convey such a complex, bizarre and (as Jaspers would have it) *un-understandable* experience to others, particularly those new to psychiatry? It is a difficult task.

Karin Fossum, the respected Norwegian crime writer, does not shy away from confronting the more unpalatable aspects of the human mind. Her portfolio has included an exploration of the psychological motivation of paedophiles, elder abusers, and vulnerable people who are drawn into crime. Her focus is not on what, but why.

*The Whisperer* centres on the unremarkable, quiet, middle-aged Ragna Reigel, who, after surgery, was left with a disability that means she cannot talk above a hoarse whisper. Isolated and ignored, no-one notices (or particularly cares) when her thoughts and behaviour start to change, until it is rather too late.

Fossum has used her talent for drawing us into the minds of the misunderstood to powerful effect. Through the format of a sensitively conducted police interview, we are carried alongside Reigel as she develops psychosis. It is an unsettling and disorienting experience.

The book captures the sense of unease and apprehension that come with delusional mood. This progresses into more defined delusions and paranoia that permeate every aspect of Reigel's life. The loss of her sense of agency and experience of perplexity and distorted perceptions is well described.

'...her overview was slipping...her body had been knocked out of its natural measured rhythm...life was no longer safe...external powers were taking over.'

'The night was no longer silent, she could hear the seven billion people who lived on this earth. They were breathing like an enormous beast, cackling and screaming and wailing.'

The language changes subtly as Reigel deteriorates, reflecting her increasingly disordered thoughts as she struggles to make sense of what is happening to her.

Through Reigel's isolation and loneliness, the book raises broader questions about how we as a society care for the vulnerable and marginalised. The effect of disability and impaired communication on mental health is considered, as is the humane treatment of offenders with mental disorders.

The book's great strength is its accessibility. It can be enjoyed on its own merits as a work of fiction; yet it also communicates an experience of psychosis in a way no text-book can. I would recommend it to medical students and trainee psychiatrists, but even seasoned psychiatrists could gain a great deal from it. Empathy starts with understanding the experience of those we care for, and *The Whisperer* - quietly, unassumingly and unnervingly - helps us to do just that.

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