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Editorial

The submissions we receive at *Ars Medica* always impress us, and we take seriously the job of presenting the works we publish to their best advantage. As part of our responsibility, we think not just about the individual pieces, but also about the conversations we provoke by bringing them together in one issue of the journal and by uniting them under the headings in the table of contents.

Over the past eleven years, *Ars Medica* has used no fewer than twenty-seven categories to group its contributions. In some cases, these categories have been purely functional. How else, for example, would we designate the writing competition winners other than by the heading *Writing Competition Winners*? Many of the other categories we have used, however, have been less straightforward: they may be vague, overlapping, or sometimes both at once. Are all *Narratives of Illness* also *Personal Narratives*? Can *Narratives of Illness* sometimes also be *Physicians' Narratives*?

The truth is that many of the texts we publish defy categorization, and the ones that appear in this issue are no exception. Dan Champion's poems ("Palliatives," "The Readers," and "Sinew") consider illness from the point of view of both doctor and carer. Ruth Deming's poem, "This is the night of your 302," describes mental illness from the perspectives of nurse, carer, and patient. In weighing up the experience of death and dying, Dale Guenter's

“Nearing the Shore,” Kaja Weeks’ “The Silver Swan and her Stroke,” and Karen L. Armstrong’s “Once upon a Time” all consider not only what it must be like to die, but also what the implications of a death are for those who continue to live—be they family members or medical practitioners.

With an eye to the complexity of categorization, this issue takes a new approach. Aside from our feature piece, the contributions have been grouped under two simple headings: prose and poetry. This is the result of the editorial board’s grappling with the tension between truth and fiction, and with the problems (and opportunities) inherent in the blurry boundary between the two. Some of our previous categories have distinguished between truth and fiction, but not all of our contributors are at liberty to write non-fiction. Doctors cannot write about their patients—or at least they cannot do so in a way that would render their patients recognizable and their confidentiality betrayed. Should the same rule apply to patients who write about their interactions with their doctors? How about people who write about the experiences of loved ones? What about pieces featuring those who cannot give their consent, such as those who suffer from severe mental health problems, or those who have died?

While we demand that medical practitioners protect their patients’ confidentiality, we yearn for stories that give us access to private worlds and personal experiences. We seek out stories of places that are culturally or socially distinct, like Maureen Hirthler’s descriptions of the borderlands of Indigenous and Western medicine in “Navajoland.”

Sometimes, we read to prepare ourselves for things we may experience one day, as with Minter Krotzer’s account of Parkinson’s in “Electric Husband” or Darian Goldin Stahl’s depiction of multiple sclerosis in her work of art, “Numb Body.” Deirdre Hennings’ “Because I Did Not See” offers the perspective of caring for someone with cancer, while Barbara Lydecker Crane’s “The Invaders” and “Dancing in the Dark” describe the experience from the perspective of the patient. We readers are likely to some day fill the shoes of the carer—and, unfortunately, many of us will also share in the suffering of the patient.

Stories can also open the door to things we may never experience in our own lives, such as the first-person accounts of the practitioner’s journey that is described by Nicole Leigh Aaronson in “Call Night” and by Clara Lu in “Speaking Medicine.” Even the most fanciful tales—such as Adrian Chapman’s fable, “Like a New Snake,” which imagines psychiatry’s place in the animal kingdom—can offer surprising reflections of and insights about reality.

In future issues, we may yet return to categories such as *Personal Narrative* and *Creative Non-Fiction*—categories where the tension between truth and fiction is laid bare right from the start. For now, however, instead of distinguishing between factual and fictional texts, we have chosen to group the contributions in such a way that will allow our readers to focus on the truths contained within.

Sarah Roger