



Memoirs

Tom Solomon

ROALD DAHL'S MARVELLOUS MEDICINE

256pp. Liverpool University Press. Paperback, £9.99.

978 1 78138 339 1

Tom Solomon met Roald Dahl in 1990 when Solomon was a junior doctor and Dahl a patient at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, and near the end of his life. The two became friends, and now Solomon has written a memoir about this association. What his book shows is how deeply medicine and illness permeated Dahl's life, explaining much about his character, his achievements and even (perhaps) his creativity.

Dahl had every reason to be both admiring and critical of medical practice. His father, aged fourteen, had his arm amputated after a doctor misdiagnosed a broken elbow as a dislocated shoulder and tried to manipulate it back into shape, with disastrous effects. When Dahl was three, his seven-year-old half-sister died, probably avoidably, of appendicitis. Dahl himself fractured his skull in a wartime plane crash, which also left him with ongoing back problems: in the course of his life he had eleven major operations. In 1960 a New York taxi crashed into Dahl's son Theo's pram, leaving him with a shattered skull. His daughter Olivia died, aged seven, of measles which turned into encephalitis. His wife Patricia suffered a cerebral haemorrhage which left her disabled physically and verbally. His stepdaughter Charlotte also fractured her skull in a car crash, and another stepdaughter, Lorina, died suddenly of ependymoma. As Solomon records, Dahl's reaction to these events was not merely passive. When Theo was fitted with a shunt to drain fluid from his brain, the shunt's valve kept blocking. Dahl contacted a toymaker he knew, and between them (in consultation with a neurosurgeon) they produced the Wade-Dahl-Till valve, subsequently fitted to thousands of children worldwide.

Dahl's second major health initiative was simply to reject traditional wisdom on the treatment of stroke. When he could not talk to Patricia, he arranged for volunteers to come and do it, and make her talk back, until she had achieved 100 per cent recovery. His approach was "fierce and unrelenting", but it worked. The amount of rehab she got in a week, it was calculated, was as much as the average stroke patient gets in a year.

Two main thoughts emerge from this book as to Dahl's own creativity. The *BFG* is remarkable for its 472 neologisms, some of which bear a resemblance to Patricia's many strange words as she struggled to speak. Dahl always had an interest in people who spoke "squiggly", but, argues Solomon, Patricia's cross-connections



Gary Hurst, Kate Bush and Douglas... Inside: Kate Bush photographed by Gary Hurst. Gallery. £100. 978 88 940130 6 1/2

may have brought it out. The other suggestion the author makes is that Dahl's terrible crack on the head in the plane crash may have affected his frontal lobes, loosening his inhibitions, freeing verbal creativity, and turning him into a case of "acquired savant syndrome". If so, this could explain Dahl's reputation for both rudeness and aggression, and for sudden acts of kindness: the latter well outweighing the former.

TOM SHIPPEY

Social Studies

Claire Fox

"I FIND THAT OFFENSIVE"

208pp. Biteback. £10.

978 1 84954 981 3

You can't say that - whatever it was you just said, probably in reference to Islam, women - if you're a man - LBGTO or people of colour (you can say whatever you like about "white men"). Claire Fox has just said it, in this stimulating short book. Her subject is intolerance of opposing points of view, reliably struck down by the charge of racism or sexism, or just the words "I find that offensive". An accusation of "Islamophobia, transphobia, biphobia" will conveniently censor an opinion that the offended party disagrees with.

Fox does not dispute that some new-generation phobias have a grounding in reality; only that it has become perilous to probe the depth of the ground. At a school in England "with over 90 per cent Muslim students" in the spring of 2015, she was "shaken" to discover that "almost everything I said in defence of Enlightenment values" - by which she means the freedom to express certain social, sexual, religious views, and the freedom granted to others to argue against them - was "met with gasps of disbelief". The *faux pas* of referring to "a picture of Mohammed on a magazine front cover", instead of "the Prophet Mohammed", shocked

THE BITTER... In the... 464pp... 978

After the defeat... battlefield and... armed forces, the vi... umental task: a cou... to moonscapes and

Magazine cover for TLS (The Times Literary Supplement) featuring the title 'TLS' in large letters, the date 'SEPTEMBER 9 2016 No. 5919', the website 'www.the-tls.co.uk', and a list of authors: Maren Meinhard, Elaine Showalter, Marjorie Perloff, Raymond Tallis, and O. J. ... The cover also features a photograph of a person's face and the text 'Childbirth' at the bottom.