

## BOOK REVIEW

### A PIECE OF MY MIND

**By Professor Gordon Parker AO [autobiography]. Published by Pan Macmillan Australia, 2012. Soft cover, 347 pages (including index), RRP \$32.99; ebook formats also available (see <http://macmillandigital.com.au>).**

ISBN-13 9781742610740

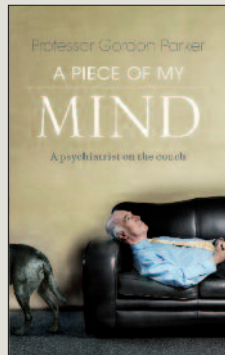
To write an autobiography is not a modest act, and in offering us something of his thinking Gordon Parker doesn't shrink from celebrating his own bloody mindedness; indeed, he carries it with pride. Despite this, *A Piece of My Mind* is no mere solipsistic travelogue, and the author walks firmly through many fields of medicine, science, philosophy, literature and history. We read about Slim Dusty and Mavis Bramston beside neuroplasticity, ECT, Konrad Lorenz, Jules Masserman, John Fowles, *totschweigtaktik* ('death by silence') and Patrick White. Gordon has been a sailor, a frequenter of the Newport Arms, and a broadcaster, reviewer, researcher, teacher, playwright and columnist.

Although probably best known for his elaboration of a binary model of depression, Gordon has interests that spread well beyond classification. He developed the parental bonding instrument (PBI), which is now an internationally used rating strategy. With others, he designed and field tested the Intimate Bond Measure (IBM) and the Life Skills Profile (LSP). In his book, Gordon looks at the process of psychiatry, seeing diagnostic and management skills as a mix of intuition driving a pattern analytic approach, discipline-based information, logic and much common sense. Despite his regard for rationality, he pursues the music and metaphor of psychiatry with the same energy and persistence as he does the aetiology, biochemistry and pharmacology. It is interesting, and perhaps typically perverse, that he chooses to depict himself lying on the couch – the classic tool of psychoanalysis for which he has at best limited regard. He is a scientist, yet willing to describe one of the distinguishing features of melancholic depression as a 'loss of the light in their eyes'.

In his personal narrative, Gordon looks at himself in the light of his family and early life, attributing his contrary nature as much to the effects of his overprotective, patrician mother as to DNA. He is the intrigued observer of his own capacity to flit between the creative, divergent and inductive modes of thinking to the convergent and deductive. He offers genuine self-criticism as he looks at some of the more difficult aspects of his style, simultaneously displaying his enormous love and respect for his wife, Heather, and for his family.

Perhaps a vanity to write one's own biography, but it is not all about Gordon. This is the tale of a man's attempt to manage the fuzzy world of psychiatry, to make science of the art. It contains great depth of wisdom and width of knowledge.

I commend it to the reader.



**Dr Julian Short**

Sydney psychiatrist and author of *An Intelligent Life: a Practical Guide to Relationships, Intimacy and Self-Esteem* (published by Random House)