probably a mistake to perceive his creativity as having burned out. He continued throughout his life to scribble equations, write papers and books, and mentor students. The pace slowed down, perhaps, but the creative fire never burned out.

What does Einstein's life and career tell us about the relationship between creativity and mental illness? Multiple studies have demonstrated a relationship between creativity in the arts and mood disorder. Einstein does not seem to have displayed any signs of suffering from mood disorder. When confronted with personal pain, he generally coped well by immersing himself in his work. However, he and his first wife (Mileva Maric) had a son who suffered from schizophrenia. There is very little empirical data on the relationship between creativity and schizophrenia, although some anecdotal hints may suggest that creativity in mathematics and science may be linked to schizophrenia. (Bertrand Russell, for example, had a family that was heavily loaded with schizophrenia.)

Einstein fell passionately in love with Maric while attending the Zurich Polytechnic; in an era when women rarely obtained a college education—never mind one in math and physics—Maric was the only female student in the class. Initially they reveled in their Bohemian lifestyle and intellectual kinship. She checked his math and provided encouragement as he developed his first flurry of major papers while working as a clerk in the Swiss Patent Office in Bern. (Isaacson provides a reasonable and balanced discussion on the question of whether she also contributed substantively to the ideas embodied in his papers…and concludes that there is no evidence that she did.) They had two sons, Hans Albert and Eduard. Gradually the bond between Maric and Einstein deteriorated, as Einstein gained more scientific recognition and began a relationship with the woman who would become his second wife, Elsa. Maric, always prone to be moody, became severely depressed and required hospitalization. Eduard was more severely ill. Initially he planned to become a psychiatrist while a medical student at Zurich University. He never achieved this goal and was eventually institutionalized for most of his life, diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia. Einstein believed that Eduard inherited the genetic predisposition toward having schizophrenia from Maric. However, this is unlikely, since she suffered from mood disorder. Einstein himself had schizotypal traits that could constitute a predisposition: he displayed echolalia beginning in childhood; he often lacked the capacity to attribute mental states to others ("theory of mind") and therefore could sometimes be socially inappropriate or insensitive, especially during his youth; he was frequently disheveled in appearance; he was dreamy and distracted. The possibility that *his* genes might have contributed to Eduard's illness apparently never occurred to him.

One of the great strengths of this biography is that it provides an intimate opportunity to observe the many brilliant players acting out their roles in science during the 20th century. The cast of characters is large—Max Planck, J.J. Thompson, Marie Curie, Arthur Eddington, Max Born, David Hilbert, Nils Bohr, Henri Poincare, Werner Heisenberg, and many more. After one reads this book, these people are no longer names we once learned about in our physics textbooks many years ago. They are real people, just as Einstein is. They come alive and share the stage with its protagonist, collectively expressing the joy and suspense and excitement and aesthetic pleasure that occur in the pursuit of understanding the scientific principles that shape our universe.

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Book review accepted for publication October 2008 (doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2008.08091381).

The Life of the Skies: Birding at the End of Nature, *by Jonathan Rosen. New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008, 336 pp., $24.00.*

As I prepared to write this review in my study, I looked out my window over the small lake in my backyard. The pink glow of dawn illuminated a gnarled live oak tree adorned with Spanish moss. A dozen white ibis sat motionless on the branches of the oak, symmetrically situated as though by an artist's rendering. The serenity of these majestic birds, oblivious to my presence, was striking. As I watched them, I felt some combination of otherness and kinship. Their stillness created a stillness in me. Yet, they seemed remote and inaccessible. I was reminded of Jonathan Rosen's observation in this absorbing new book that bird watching is a path to the universal through the particular—a linking of infinity with the commonplace.

Rosen takes the reader on a journey that is his own journey. The title he has chosen comes from a poem by D.H. Lawrence: "Birds are the life of the skies, and when they fly, they reveal the thoughts of the skies" (p. 12). In the course of this excursion, he visits a host of colorful historical characters who share his passion for bird watching: Audubon, Thoreau, Whitman, and Wallace, to name a few. The book is also sprinkled with a surprising number of references to Freud, reflecting the author's psychological orientation to the subject. He notes, for example, that bird watchers must possess a combination of Zen-like devotion and type A anality.

Rosen was an unassuming essayist for *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* before the bird watching bug bit him in 2000. Much of the book documents his quest for the elusive ivory-billed woodpecker that drew him to the Louisiana swamps in the fall of that year. He was gradually transformed into a denizen of a subculture of obsessive ivory-billed seekers. This intrepid group is committed to proving that the legendary bird is not actually extinct. Fueled by two well-publicized sightings, Rosen and a motley group of like-minded birders trudged through snake-infested swamps with their sights set on the ornithological version of the Holy Grail.

In this regard, Rosen is part reporter and part anthropologist, exploring a culture unfamiliar to many of us, complete with its customs, conventions, and politics. However, he is also equal part psychologist, contemplating the primal origins of the pursuit of an elusive creature. We are in Melville country here. Like the tale of Ahab and his hunt for the great white whale or Peter Matthiessen's account of the search for the snow leopard, the story engages reader and author in a joint effort to chart the anatomy of obsession. We know in advance that Rosen will come up empty-handed in his search, but we also come to understand that it is the journey and not the destination that counts. Rosen also recognizes the undercurrent of loss in such quests: "There is a part of birdwatching that for me is always associated with losses, and with the hunt for something irretrievable…The sensation of finding something and then finally realizing that it was lost without your having known it, and then recognizing that other things are missing, too, and that this bird is just a tiny piece of what you want" (p. 150). Rosen wisely observes that bird watchers are not simply returning to nature but returning to themselves.

The book fascinates with its historical anecdotes, its esoteric trivia about a variety of different birds, some of which will be totally unfamiliar to you, and its message about the urgent need to preserve what's left of our environment. Nature lovers must read this book, but its message goes far beyond those enamored of bird watching. Rosen teaches us that the way we regard nature is intimately connected with the way we regard ourselves. He ends the book with his characteristic psychological reflectiveness: "What sort of species are we, and what might we still become? The answer is still being written, even at this late date. This is the magic hour. There is still time, before the light fades and there is no longer anything left to see" (p. 300).

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Book review accepted for publication August 2008 (doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2008.08081192).

Poets on Prozac: Mental Illness, Treatment, and the Creative Process, *edited by Richard M. Berlin, M.D. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, 200 pp., $21.95.*

If this collection of essays, edited by psychiatrist/poet Richard Berlin, was published in the United Kingdom, Canada, or Australia, it might have been called "Poets in Therapy," a more accurate, if less sexy and alliterative title. About more than pharmacotherapy, the book's first-person testimonials from successful poets who found themselves in desperate straits cast light on the reservations many creative people have about getting help.

In the words of the poet J.D. Smith: "For a poet, seeking treatment for depression is to break with an implicit social contract. To the extent that the culture at large has a view of poets, beyond acknowledging their existence as a strange but seldom seen life form, such as a platypus or giant squid, that view is based on the Romantic myth of the poet as a distraught creature, preferably consumptive, who occasionally breaks forth in a song or a dirge. The poet in this view is morose so that others do not have to be, a pack mule for the collective burden of consciousness."

When such reluctant individuals do seek professional help, the American health care system further complicates the matter with a scarcity of treatment resources, insurance company limitations and prejudices, and out-of-pocket payments that poorly-paid creative artists can ill afford. Ironically, the first essay in the book, by Welsh poet Gwyneth Lewis, expresses gratitude for the National Health Service that provided her with some 15 years of weekly psychotherapy. Such contrasts to the American system were rightly debated during the recent presidential election campaign.

Many books have been written about the so-called "confessional" poets, such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton, all of whom suffered bouts of florid mental illness and whose creative writing careers, and very lives, were extended by psychiatric treatment. There have also been first-person narratives of mental torment written by masters of prose, such as novelist William Styron's wrenching account *Darkness Visible.*

The poets/patients who have provided Dr. Berlin with exquisitely revealing details of their illnesses have not achieved the mythic status of a Lowell or a Plath or the fame of a Styron. The nitty-gritty details of their struggle to keep writing despite a range of psychiatric symptoms that includes mood swings, debilitating anxiety, eating disorders, and postpartum depression will resonate with any creative person in need of relief yet simultaneously fearing the effects of becoming more stable or less exquisitely sensitive. In Gwyneth Lewis's words, "Since I was a child, I've lacked an emotional epidermis. This is good for writing—it means I can sense a lot—but bad for one's daily equilibrium."

Several of the poets offer excerpts from their work, including poems written both in medicated and unmedicated states. The issue of how medication affects creative writing can never be fully resolved, though Lewis states, "Even if it were proven that antidepressants adversely affected my ability as a poet, I'd still take them. After being a zombie for months, being able to write at all is a miracle, and that participation in the creative discipline, rather than a more objective measure of excellence, is the bottom line for me."

This book belongs on the shelves of all therapists who treat women and men who immerse themselves in creative writing or any other fine art. Dr. Berlin's pithy introduction provides a useful summary of the relationship between creativity and emotional disorder. The 16 essays and the poetic excerpts that bolster them share the virtues of being heartfelt, accessible, and brief. They can be read by highly literate women and men, even those in the midst of an emotional maelstrom.

No less a psychiatrist than Freud wrote, "Everywhere I go I find that a poet has been there before me." No less a poet than the great American Robert Lowell wrote, after yet another debilitating round of bipolar illness, "Everyone's tired of my turmoil."

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Book review accepted for publication May 2008 (doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2008.08050681).

The Sorrows of an American: A Novel, *by Siri Hustvedt. New York, Henry Holt and Co., 2008, 320 pp., $25.00.*

The Sorrows of an American is the fourth novel published by author Siri Hustvedt. It consists of several interwoven stories whose protagonists are two adult children of a Norwegian immigrant family and takes place during the year following their father's death. At times the writing is sheer stream of consciousness, swiftly grafting details of each story on the others, so the novel's central line becomes a bit difficult to follow. It is, however, apparent that this is a novel about the archetypal father, as father figures are central throughout the book. Indeed, the acknowledgments reveal that the book's scaffolding leans on original excerpts from the journal written and left behind by the author's father.

Erik Davidsen is a New York psychiatrist whose emotionally impoverished life after a divorce, focused almost exclusively on his work, suddenly becomes more animated with the ap-