

of cartographies of disease and documents the epistemology of the spatial classification of disease symptoms and origins. Advancements in the history of medicine, such as Vesalius' use of experiential knowledge to draw anatomy, align with developments in cartography, such as the insertion of longitude and latitude as spatial reference points to refine maps as tools of enquiry and empirical workbenches.

In the second section, the author invites the reader closer to the workbench, using cholera as the exemplar. Through critical review, assimilation and even secondary analysis of a century's worth of epidemiological data, maps and theories, Koch documents

the range of mapping experiments conducted by scientists, physicians, bureaucrats and theologians as they strove to explain and control the local outbreaks of cholera that exacted a pandemic toll. He debunks the notion that John Snow was the singular hero who cracked the case by removing the handle from the Broad Street pump and rightly repositions the complexity of scientific investigation back within its broad and dissenting community.

The third section briefly features cancer as the new cholera and opens the door for innovative mapping techniques to explore the geospatial attributes of chronic diseases that today's studies offer about the built environment.

This is a gravid, heavy book about the often overlooked, yet extremely important spatial dimension of disease relationships. It merits slow pondering and deliberate thought, enhanced perhaps by a dictionary to look up the origins and meanings of certain words — eccentric, malaria and constative — and a magnifying glass to zoom in on certain points in the illustrated maps not apparent to the onlookers on first inspection, particularly when they are biased.

Erica Weir MD MSc
Associate Editor, Research
CMAJ

CMAJ 2012. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.111516

POETRY

Trainspotting in the clinic

We talked about his trains:
HO and N gauge, and even Z
which is two hundred twenty times smaller
than the real Santa Fe he rode as a kid
and is now too small to paint in his withered,
shaking hands
that swell on a sunny morning before
the next day of surprise showers.

We talked about the majestic mountains:
he carved them out of stacked, blue Styrofoam blocks,
then melted edges with hot wires to fall in butter
avalanches
and covered it with plaster cheesecloth
and brushed hues of brown, grey and green,
and glued sprinkled gravel and grass into
undulating meadows at the base
with a blue trickling waterfall of Magic Water cascading
down the side
running into a foaming stream where
he fly-fished as a kid in Colorado.

We talked about the rickety wooden bridge he built
across the gorge
that leads into the other cliff face beyond the orchard
and how he was troubleshooting for days to figure out
just why his Chattanooga would derail on exiting
the far tunnel —
he took apart the track, cleaned it, rubbed it, re-soldered
the connectors —
the switch is jammed, or there must be plaster caught
in the ties, he shrugged.



© 2012 Thinkstock

He talked on and on about his old Baltimore & Ohio
steam locomotive
whose stack still billows wisps of actual smoke
if you pop off its golden whistle and squeeze down
some drops
but whose motor is now too gummed up to churn.

He talked 'til I stood on the caboose railing next to him,
watching the granite cliffside fade back,
the track slinking beneath us under a wake of smoke,
the thundering wheels and the occasional bell,
'til he leaned forward and shook my hand firmly,
"It's okay, doctor. I know it's spread,"
and we talked some more about everything but.

Majid Mohiuddin MD
Clinical associate professor
Department of Oncology
University of Texas Medical School
Houston, Tex.

CMAJ 2012. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.111771