

Book

Healing the heartbroken

There are many memoirs of mental illness. *The Scar: A Personal History of Depression and Recovery* is different. At the age of 27, Mary Cregan was living in New York (NY, USA) and working in book design when she gave birth to her first child, Anna. Tragically, Anna died 2 days later, and Cregan began to descend into a state of suicidal despair and depression.

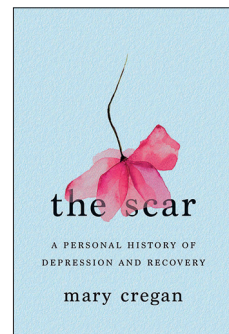
Cregan's account of this event, and the circumstances leading up to and following it, is nuanced, reflective, and devastating. Perhaps the most compelling part of her memoir concerns her hospitalisation: the admission process, the psychological and physical treatments provided (she benefited from electroconvulsive therapy), the hospital milieu, and Cregan's slow but definite recovery.

Cregan is especially insightful when discussing treatment, writing with disarming candour that "when antidepressants begin to work, the relief feels almost like joy". When you are suicidal, she explains, "you need to have someone who knows how bad things are for you, someone to watch over you". She continues, "This person needs to be experienced and professional, and someone

you completely trust, because he or she will hold the lifeline as the waves crash over you. This person should be your psychiatrist, not your spouse, your lover, your sister, or your best friend—none of whom should be exposed to the full force of your despair, or feel responsible for keeping you alive. Your psychiatrist is deeply invested, far more than you are yourself, in your survival, and knows that even a person in your wretched condition can survive."

Today, Cregan lectures in English literature at Barnard College in New York. She writes beautifully and integrates an excellent history of psychiatry into her personal story. As a result, *The Scar* is not only a deeply affecting memoir that offers a piercing, compassionate insight into mental illness and its treatment, but also a scholarly demonstration of how the steps and missteps in the history of psychiatry have led us to where we are today. Cregan's welcome emphasis on recovery and her exploration of how personal identity changes following serious suicidality add further unique dimensions to this excellent book.

Brendan D Kelly



The Scar: A Personal History of Depression and Recovery
Mary Cregan
WW Norton & Company, 2019
pp 256, US\$26.95
ISBN 9781324001720

Movies of the Mind

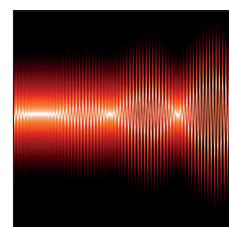
The unsound world of Peter Strickland

Katalin Varga (Hilda Péter) is on a mission for revenge. Thrown out by her husband, and with her young son Orbàn (Norbert Tankó) in tow, she sets out to hunt down the individuals who are the source of her outcast status. Katalin and Orbàn creep along in their cart, Orbàn asking questions and getting no answers. The mountains above them are mist-covered. Workers in the fields all around harvest crops with scythes. We know the era is now, just about, because Katalin occasionally uses a mobile phone. In all other respects, the action is timeless.

When director Peter Strickland received an inheritance of £28 000, he knew he wanted to use it to make a film. *Katalin Varga* was shot on location in the Carpathian mountains in just over 2 weeks and went on to win a Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival for its sound design. Strickland has continued to put sound at the centre of his films, using it to draw us into the psychological and emotional life of his protagonists. 2012's *Berberian Sound Studio* centres on Gilderoy (Toby Young), a radiophonic genius accustomed to a tranquil existence in his back garden studio, who's hired to create the sound design for a movie in Italy. He thinks *The Equestrian Vortex* is about horses, but when he gets there it turns out to be a

Suspria-like exploitation movie (the genre known in Italy as Giallo) and he rapidly finds his equilibrium upset by the images that the melon-stabbing, lettuce-ripping foley conjures up. 2018's *In Fabric*, starring the scandalously underused and utterly brilliant Marianne Jean-Baptiste, follows a cursed dress as it makes its way from victim to victim, causing their cupboards to creak, their skin to burn, and their washing machines to explode.

A 2017 study by researchers at Brighton and Sussex Medical school, working with artist Mark Ware, found that exposure to natural sounds tended to calm fight-or-flight responses, leading to greater relaxation and so-called rest and digest responses in participants. When exposed to artificial sound, meanwhile, participants' "brain connectivity showed an inward focus," more akin to states of anxiety and depression. There is a scene in *Katalin Varga* where Katalin and Orbàn walk across a meadow and up to the tree line of an ancient forest. As they walk, Strickland expunges all natural sound from the scene. Instead of the wind in the trees and birdsong, we hear the grinding, ominous tones of the sound design. It's airless and doom-laden. The viewer feels claustrophobic as Katalin stares, transfixed with horror



For the **study on sound and emotional response** see <https://www.sciencedaily.com/>

For the **5-4-3-2-1 technique** see <https://www.mayoclinic.healthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/5-4-3-2-1-countdown-to-make-anxiety-blast-off>