

SECTION EDITOR: MURAD ALAM, MD

www.dermanities.com

Edited by Benjamin Barankin, MD, and David J. Elpern, MD; accessed January 22, 2004.

Dermanities, an open-access electronic humanities journal for dermatologists, is a peaceful place on the Web. Designed to entertain, challenge, and heal, it is a slim but carefully wrought literary magazine of the type felicitously found in the corners of bookstores for serious readers.

Some of the pieces are about dermatology, but this is neither a clinical dermatology journal nor solely a compendium of thoughts relevant to dermatology. It is not even necessarily about dermatologists. Instead, *Dermanities* is aimed at dermatologists and other physicians who embrace life beyond the daily routine. If the *Wall Street Journal* is for doctors who want to get rich, *Dermanities* is for doctors who read literature and poetry and appreciate art and film.

So far, there have been 6 issues of *Dermanities*. The product from the 2003 holiday season is representative. On the cover is a *JAMA*-esque high-resolution photograph of a winter landscape. Within, the sections include humor, literature and cinema reviews, and "poems of all sizes." The reviews as well as the sections on "illness narratives" and "physician health and well-being" are guided by a slightly earnest "physician, heal thyself" ethos, but the long poetry section is more varied. Only some of the poems are concrete musings on healing and death; others are relatively abstract and tangentially, if at all, related to medicine.

Dermanities is an egalitarian journal. Authors include nonphysicians, medical students and residents, and eminent dermatologists such as Ernst Epstein, MD, and Richard Sontheimer, MD. Elpern

and Barankin, the editors of this enterprise, have somehow managed to maintain quality without subjecting authors' submissions to needlessly intrusive revision. Everyone's story is their own. The ruthless self-discipline, efficiency, and focus on facts that have overtaken the practice of clinical medicine are not the paradigm here, in this quiet refuge for the thoughtful physician.

One of the best sections in *Dermanities* is "Dermographies." Each "dermography" is an interview with a prominent dermatologist who is asked to consider his or her life and career and respond frankly to fundamental questions about both. In the fourth issue, the guest speaker was Alfred Kopf, MD, who shared with us an eclectic group of musings, including why he chose dermatology and the best piece of advice he has received. Beyond "Dermographies," each issue has at least a few quirky pieces that can elicit a smile. Still in the fourth issue, Lisa Lipkin discussed dermatology and baseball, and Wayne Winterrowd offered a monograph on the genus *Rhus* that evaluates, via the shrubby plants, the journal's sociopolitical and aesthetic significance—thus, everything is welcome in "Dermographies" but a propensity to induce contact dermatitis.

Dermanities, an ambitious undertaking by Elpern and Barankin, makes one proud to be a dermatologist. We are more than pimple poppers after all, and we have a literary journal to prove it. For the inveterate Web surfers among us, here is a site we can visit while procrastinating; it is less depressing than endlessly rereading the news, and better for us, too.

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Utility Index: Useful

Production Quality: Outstanding

Primary Readership: Patients, physicians

Value for Money: Bargain

Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery

by Virginia L. Blum, 356 pp, with illustrations, \$29.95, ISBN 0-520-21723-3, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003.

Virginia Blum appears to see herself as a survivor of cosmetic surgery. But in her conceptualization, she is less a victim than a co-conspirator, alternately seduced and repelled by the promise of beauty, clinically delivered after a brief snooze under general anesthesia. Introduced to surgical enhancement at an early age when her large, broad nose, stereotypically perhaps more African or Indian than Jewish, went under the knife, she begins this book in the first person:

Certainly, a surgeon who preyed on maternal fantasies and the insecurities of young girls wasn't about to let me go, not once he had me in his orbit. I made it clear how little I wanted this surgery. He said he would never operate against my wishes, but I should be aware that this rhinoplasty would make me beautiful. "Now," he began impressively, "you are better looking than eight out of ten girls." He hesitated slightly before elaborating more profoundly: "With this surgery, you will be a ten." My mother almost exploded with vicarious narcissism.

But while Blum's book begins with her, its heart is a free-wheeling critical analysis of the culture of cosmetic surgery. A professor of English, Blum wields a less disciplined pen than a surgeon or social scientist and incorporates material from literary texts, psychological discourses, film, popular media, and a variety of other sources. The core material on which she builds her analysis is a series of open-ended in-