

## **Book Review**

**Title:** *Encounters with the Invisible: Unseen Illness, Controversy, and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome*

**Author:** Dorothy Wall

**Publisher:** Southern Methodist University, 2005

Cloth, ISBN: 0-87074-504-2, 318 pages

**Cost:** \$22.50 USD

**Reviewer:** Steven E. Brown

*Encounters with the Invisible* is a fascinating story about the author's personal experiences with a little-understood illness (to use her word), its impact on her life and that of her family, its role (or lack thereof) in the medical community, and its devastating effects on the lives of many others. Wall brings three great skills to this story: she has an ability to poke and prod into her own life and how Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) has taken hold; she weaves her own story with that of how CFS advocates have worked to legitimize their condition within their own lives and within the medical community, and she writes with the poetic prose of someone who is both a poet and an editor.

My only real complaint about the book is that some of the anecdotes, particularly in relation to the medical community and lack of research funds directed toward CFS are repetitive. But I understand why. This is an advocacy book, as well as a personal story, and Wall wants more monies directed to CFS research. One reason for this less than subtle approach is the inability of others to understand that an unseen condition is not an unmet one:

“For all the times I’ve tried to explain this illness to others, there have been just as many times I felt too tired to make the effort. I often preferred to shoulder the burden of illness in private rather than fight not only illness, but the battle for recognition and assistance” (p. 12).

One of the more interesting questions Wall visits and revisits is why the medical community refuses to believe that people are visiting their offices with real issues. She reminds us of a time prior to modern diagnostic techniques when physicians actually had to listen to their patients to have an understanding of their complaints. Disability rights activists and disability studies scholars will certainly recognize this pattern. At the same time these two groups are likely to be uncomfortable with the author's liberal use of terms like “sufferer” and “afflicted.”

*Encounters with the Invisible* is an excellent introduction to CFS, its individual consequences, its social context, and an ever-unfolding story.