
POETRY | FALL 2021

Leave My Soul Alone!

By Jack Coulehan

For Dr. Dannie Abse

In your poem, a surgeon
placed a probe into his patient's brain
to determine the tumor's margin
but touched instead a forbidden zone
that caused a frigid voice to cry,
Leave my soul alone!

A nucleus, a metal probe,
a cause of unexpected anguish.
How could he have known that probing
might pierce the invisible? Or make
the impossible speak? I've sent
less rigid probes –

words, stories, skin – to touch
that source, sometimes achieved success
and sometimes pain. My loneliness,
whether it lives within the brain
or not, demands response. I cannot
leave the soul alone.

Jack Coulehan is an Emeritus Professor of Medicine and former Director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics at Stony Brook University. Coulehan's essays, poems and stories appear frequently in healthcare journals and literary magazines, and his work is widely anthologized. He is the author of seven collections of poetry including *The Talking Cure: New and Selected Poems*.

© 2021 *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*