

## POETRY SYMPOSIUM 2023

**medical student 1**– Doctors of Representation; addresses patient directly (I and you); a white doctor “his coat embodies his skin” judges the patient for eating familiar foods, wearing a hijab, assumes her husband controls her; the doctor may have more experience, more status than the narrator, “but he is not aware/of who we really are, or what we’ve suffered through;” the narrator questions why this arrogant doctor should be in charge – “why let him drive this way, while I take a backseat?”; she begs the patient “why not let me draw your blood, when that is what we share?”

The narrator sees that this is where they begin their journey as a healer; she has faith that the patient soon will see that she can help the patient heal; she will see why the narrator chose this path and who she is committed to; she beseeches the patient not to let the cold doctor win, not to choose a stranger over one who understands her and is ready to cure through love and care

Poem is a form of quatern, a 16 line sonnet, each stanza carefully constructed with its own thoughtful rhyme scheme (stanza 1 abba, abba; stanza 2 abacac using an ending in a couplet

**PhD candidate, Public Health** Swimming; ‘I have generations of pain creeping in my muscles’ which perhaps have led to “deep clouds hovering over me” and “dark nights taking hold of me”; the narrator seems drowning in the tears of her grief and pain, which become a river, an ocean of suffering; but the poem takes a turn toward resistance and defiance “I will not let you/drown me here at sea”; they realize they know how to swim, they’ve “swum before and will swim again”; she is determined not to accept what is in place of what can be; the narrator is determined “to find a way bac/to being just me.”; the tone is desperate, brave, determined.

**medical student 2** – Trust; Islamic greeting, “Peace be upon you;” a prayer for inner and outer peace; doctors told her Muslim friends, “Your mental health will improve if you take off your hijab”; although in some Muslim sects, lowering one’s eyes is a sign of respect, a doctor told a friend to gaze into his eyes for 3 minutes to “build her confidence”; many people of color do not have trust in either the healthcare system or their doctors; a Latino w/COVID who confessed to the student he wanted to commit suicide, but had not been able to confide his suicidality to the doctor he’d seen the day before because “the doctor hadn’t asked”; however, there can be positive encounters as well based on careful listening, nonjudgmentalness, sensitivity to patients’ emotions, avoiding patient blame and making all patients feel valued and affirmed. The student also could not fast this past Ramadan for health reasons, and hearing the simple words expressed from the doctor to the patient “It’s not your fault” was healing. Too often doctors may lay personal blame on patients for structural problems.

**medical student 3**– Mirrors; “a mirror is the greatest truth-teller” because it does not judge, offer advice, stir the pot; instead, it is still, silent, receptive; it sees body and soul as one; the mirror affirms the narrator’s “blackness in all its glory”; and just as the mirror reflects her blackness, so too is she a mirror for the ancestors that have gone before her; the best way she’s discovered to push back against those who judge, intellectualize, claim superiority is to be a mirror reflecting back their own recognition of the truth of the mirror and the cognitive dissonance it reveals

**physician 1**; addresses white people directly (I, you); the painful realization that, no matter how well-educated, how articulate, how wise and knowledgeable, how well-dressed, no matter the complex roles of husband, father, son, teacher, physician a person of color evokes fear “where can I run? Where Can I

hide?” and then hate; power and privilege always trump the person of color’s humanity; the narrator is helpless in the face of your fear; the last stanza is a touching hope that the narrator and the person he addresses can meet, talk, and discover all they have in common – hopes, dreams, families; he asks, would choosing love and understanding really be so hard?; he pleads the other to see him as God sees him – as all His children; and he raises the possibility that, just as these people now judge, so too shall they one day be judged by God Almighty

**physician 2;** Fourth of July; appeal to Lady Liberty to borrow her sandals so that she can gather the ashes that have fallen from a (partially extinguished?) torch, hair from buffalos almost made extinct in the sweep of Europeans westward, the sweat of immigrants who built this country; and from these ingredients the narrator “and her friends” (i.e., everyone who is part of this country) could “fashion a talisman/to wear over their hearts/**to help us recognize each other again**”; how can we heal the wounds?; how can we recognize each other in friendship and respect; the line “whether standing or kneeling” references Colin Kapernick’s protest of racial injustice in this country; the final two lands remind us that we are supposed to be the land of the free, home of the brave; and implicitly challenge us to consider how well we are fulfilling this description

**physician 3–** Protest; while protesting racism as a national health emergency, the narrator is confronted by a yelling man who informs her .01% of the population is racist; she wonders how she can explain she believes the current White House (Trump) is a “place of necropolicy” (a pun on the word necropolis, a large cemetery, and public policy) and “Russian roulette” (alluding to the closeness of Trump to the authoritarian, antidemocratic Putin); she wants everyone “to get back to America” and administer CPR before the country flatlines

**physician 4 -** Make America Heal Again; riffs on MAGA (MAHA); to heal, we first need to grieve; realizes that underneath all the anger, is sorrow and fear; what is most hopeful is his belief that healing is not far away, buried under layers, but near at hand; what is required for healing is love; healing must start with oneself (“Take hold of yourself and heal”); turning of the wheel may refer to the capacity to effect great change with universal consequences

**physician 5 –** Our Journey; the narrator gleefully reports that he has been on “an unlearning spree”; true wisdom is available “for free,” it’s right in front of our faces; why then do we persist in divisions between people that our ego makes; with honesty and courage, we must pursue justice and equity on our journeys.