

FM REVIEW 2017 8 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This poem describes a young patient with psoriasis, eczema, or some related condition. It seeks to suggest the psychological and social impact of this disease. I'm always partial to poetic attempts by medical students; but I did not find this one particularly gripping. It is neither terrible nor wonderful. In trying to analyze the deficiency, I think a key lies in the title, which promises getting "behind" the external observation of symptoms - yet most of the poem is a rather objective description of the patient. There is a certain remoteness in the language despite the author's obvious empathy. This may be because of the reliance on the third person voice, which makes even the final question sound somewhat academic. In general the poem lacks vivid imagery and compelling use of metaphor. A good exception is the description of the patient's scales as "mother of pearl poised atop fires". This is both original and intriguing because it makes something beautiful of that which more often invites distaste. I also like the final stanza, which finally gets at the difference between treating and healing, and helps move the reader "behind" the diagnosis; and I like its near-rhyme in the middle lines (light/suffice). An unresolved question is a thought-provoking note to end on. Nevertheless it still seems emotionally rather distant. I do not have specific suggestions for revision, other than enriching the language and spending more of the poem "behind the scales."

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This poem describes a young patient with psoriasis, eczema, or some related condition. It seeks to suggest the psychological and social impact of this disease. I admired the intent of the poem, which I believe is to humanize the situation of this patient, but I was not as moved as I should have been. In trying to analyze the deficiency, I think a key lies in the title, which promises getting "behind" the external observation of symptoms - yet most of the poem is a rather objective description of the patient. There is a certain remoteness in the language despite your obvious empathy. This may be because of your reliance on the third person voice, which makes even the final question sound somewhat academic. In general the poem lacks vivid imagery and compelling use of metaphor. A good exception is the description of the patient's scales as "mother of pearl poised atop fires". This is both original and intriguing because it makes something beautiful of that which more often invites distaste. I also found the final stanza to be strong, because it finally gets at the difference between treating and healing, and helps move the reader "behind" the diagnosis; and I like its near-rhyme in the middle lines (light/suffice). An unresolved question is a thought-provoking note to end on. Nevertheless it still seems emotionally rather distant.

I would suggest rewriting by exploring voice – experiment with writing this poem in the 1st and/or second person. Find images that bring to life the patient's loneliness and hopelessness. Try to go "behind the scales" more deeply, so that the reader cannot escape this patient's suffering.