

FM REVIEW 2017 24 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This poem about a migrant worker has potential, but also needs some work on two fronts: 1) the craft, particularly in the first stanza, is compromised by sporadic reliance on medical terminology, and an at times unlyrical cadence 2) the message, which in my view and in the eyes of reviewer 2, is a bit complacent about the medical team coming in to deliver basic health care and then departing. I do agree the topic deserves attention, and hopefully the author can correct some of the poem's shortcomings.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this poem, which paints a moving portrait of a migrant farm worker. Your respect and concern for this patient are evident.

Nevertheless, both reviewers and assistant editor feel the poem can be improved in several respects:

1) **Craft:** a) Please pay attention to reviewer 1's comments about the first stanza. The tone is somewhat uneven, vacillating between the lyrical and the mundane. The suggestion to "read it aloud" for cadence is an excellent one. Please do so and revise. b) Sometimes medical terminology can be effective in a poem, particularly to convey a sense of remoteness and objectivity; but not in this case, where your goal is just the opposite. Try to avoid the diagnostic terms and stick with simple description.

2) **Interaction of narrator and patient:** Reviewer 1 expresses a desire to see more of the interaction between narrator and patient. In the poem it is described as "respectful attention," "[patient] is seen and heard" but this is more telling than showing. You follow up with some helpful details (hard work acknowledged, family asked after, photos admired) that paint a picture - but their power is depleted by the use of the passive voice. Consider deleting the lines about "attention" and "seen and heard" and offering more images that help the reader FEEL the attention and respect paid to this individual.

3) **Message:** Although certainly not your intention, the message that comes across might seem a bit glib to some readers. "We gave this patient respect, all is well." It is very complicated to try to address social issues in poetry in a way that does not seem polemical and didactic, but I wonder if you feel that offering attention and respect is enough. The team did what it could, but this farmworker is still left in a painful predicament. Is there any way you could indicate this discrepancy? As an instance of unintentional glibness, using the word "honored" to describe how the migrant workers feel when the healthcare team shows up sounds a little self-congratulatory. Perhaps they felt appreciative or hopeful - but "honored" sounds like the doctors were doing them a favor.

Thank you for considering these issues. The topic you have chosen remains hidden all too often, and we are delighted to see it addressed in this thoughtful and lyrical manner.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This poem started out as an occasionally sentimental tribute to migrant farmworkers. With reviewer encouragement, it has become a much more powerful piece raising questions about how we are all implicated in cheap, insufficiently regulated, and back-breaking labor to provide foodstuffs and commodities we desire. The author has done an excellent job of revising

along the lines recommended by reviewers and assistant editor, both in terms of style and, more importantly, in terms of the message of the poem. Also, she resists the urge to provide solutions, easy or otherwise, which is not really the province of poetry. I am asking her to make a few minor word changes to tighten the cadence of rhythm of the poem.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for such careful and passionate revisions. The poem is much stronger, less sentimental and more challenging. The line "Does our care, though compassionate, serve as scaffold for the sin?" is awesome - beautifully turned, and so honest. The last line is similarly compelling.

I applaud your raising questions about how we are all implicated in cheap, insufficiently regulated, and back-breaking labor to provide foodstuffs and commodities we desire. The format of questions I found both appropriate and uncomfortable in the best sense of that word. This format not only shares your own thoughts and feelings but also makes the reader think and feel. Poetry should not be prescriptive, but questioning.

The poem now succeeds very well in acknowledging the grueling labor of farmworkers while also recognizing their dignity and grace. The poem brings to life this individual as a human being who works, suffers, and dreams. You have also completely succeeded in eliminating the unintended slightly patronizing tone which crept in on occasion. The poem as now written is humble, appreciative, and on occasion, agonized.

I also love the sound of pterygia, you are right to keep it.

I'm suggesting a few minor word changes, mostly organized around the overuse of the word "work" (see attached). Sometimes repetition serves a particular purpose, but in this case I couldn't really detect one; and I think varying the term will help with the sound and flow of the poem. Also, I was unsure what the phrase "scars of always-leaving" means and hope you can clarify. Finally, I would like you to consider more contemporary formatting, i.e., capitalization based on sentence structure, not line (again, see attached). Along these lines, I think you should remove other line punctuation, such as periods and commas (but not question marks, which help interpret meaning).

This has become a really wonderful poem that forces all of us to confront the hard questions. Thanks for writing it.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: The author has done a superb job of revision, not only working with editorial suggestions, but making additional tweaks, such as the insertion of the word "migrant" into the title, that really improve the poem's craft. There is now more attention paid to image and alliteration, as well as the visual presentation of the poem on the page. The result increases the space for pausing and reflection as the reader peruses the piece. I like everything about this version and recommend accepting the poem for publication.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Everything about this version shows thoughtfulness and craft. The addition of the word "migrant" to the title is an excellent catch. The phrase "industry and expertise"

is terrific, wish I'd thought of it. The phrase "scars of separation" is both evocative and, in my view, more accessible. The simple, nonevaluative question "What could he have created?" makes the reader work harder to answer this query, and is therefore a stronger line. The revised phrasing does indeed create more space for thought. Altogether, this is a powerful poem that engages the reader in our complicity with injustice while showing the dignity that enables this worker to rise above exploitation. When people read this poem they will recognize that its message is near and close at hand - which is a good thing. Thank you for considering Family Medicine as an outlet for your work.