

FM REVIEW 2018 38 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is not a great poem, but there is something about it that I liked (maybe because I'm an oldster myself, I was moved by the tribute!). The tone, although unfortunately not consistent, at times achieves an elegiac note that I found moving. Some of the stanzas I thought were successful, capturing the calmer, larger perspective of these "old doctors." At other points the poem seemed to fall off the track, the language becoming awkward and unclear. I also agree that there is a lack of imagery and metaphor, the addition of which could strengthen the poem. My recommendation would be to give the author a chance to deepen the poem and clean up some of the unsuccessful aspects.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: I liked this poem for its tribute to older physicians and the elegiac tone it achieves (unfortunately, only inconsistently). Some of the stanzas effectively capture the calmer, larger perspective of these "older doctors." The poem also suggests their wisdom - they've seen a lot, and everything they've seen has taught them something.

While many of the lines, and even whole stanzas, were lyrical and quietly moving, others were not as successful. In the attached I make a few suggestions. The content of these suggestions may not be right, but at least in my read, they are in response to lines where problems exist that need attention.

Perhaps the most lovely stanza is the one comparing the docs to watercraft navigating between the islands of academics and rural practitioners. This is a really creative and unusual image that is emotionally evocative and intellectually thought-provoking. Its effectiveness is found in part because of the metaphor you employ. I'd encourage you to look for other opportunities to work with metaphor and imagery. For example, your description of the orange juice and coffee is unexceptional and not interesting. Could you enliven this image somehow?

Other lines that I struggled with were:

1) "Men and women who..." It's hard to work EBM into a poem. I did like the contrast created with the "objects saved" (this was a good image), but these first two lines are awkward and not very impactful. Similarly, the last line in that stanza about "matrons at church and grandpatients" is confusing to me. What are "grandpatients"? Why matrons? Why church? Please see if you can come up with a clearer and more compelling image to convey that these docs have had the opportunity to see their patients grow up, live, and even die (if that was the point).

3) The last stanza is good, both honoring and poignant. However, to me the last line does not read like a last line. Send in the younger colleagues - to what? For what purpose? I'd like a little more finality to this poignant passing of the torch.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: In some respects, this poem improved, but in others, it got worse. I especially dislike stanza 5 - it is uninteresting, evokes little if any feeling, and is just clunkily written. It's trying to find a potentially beautiful central image - the young seeking wisdom and consolation from the old - but it hasn't found it yet. The final two lines of the poem, which are very pedestrian and do way too much "explaining" on a very literal, unpoetic level also do not add anything to the poem. I still like the poem as a tribute to the "old docs" but I'm not sure it's moving in the right direction. I suggest some fixes below, but am not in love with them.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: I still like the tribute nature of this poem, and think some of the changes are improvements, but have the following recommendations:

stanza 1, line 2 - remove the exclamation point; not needed and tells rather than shows the narrator's emotions

stanza 2, line 2 - like the deer metaphor; it evokes a lovely image of old faculty moving through the forest of academia

stanza 4, line 4 - I suggest removing the "Yet"; to me it is BECAUSE they have seen the joys and sorrows that they keep these mementos.

stanza 5 - I'm sorry, this still doesn't work very well for me. I don't like the fragmented lines, and I don't understand why their former students are only residents - wouldn't they be faculty themselves as well? The lines "time and again/need quiet reassurance" seem rather pedestrian. How about something along these lines:

(I recommend "session" rather than lecture, because you talk about lectures in the 7th stanza)

At session breaks, former students appear

In their frenzied years, finishing residency,

building careers starting families

they seek comfort, reassurance

stanza 7 - sorry, those last two lines still do not work for me. They seem trite "time has come" and too concrete "caretake the practice." I'm looking for a larger statement that hints at more than just managing a practice - generations shifting, the baton passing. "To deal with what lies ahead"?

Also, in this stanza, I'd favor for line 1 "Drifting off during a lecture, they dream of..."

Finally, I would recommend using sentence capitalizations (only capitalizing words that start a new "sentence") rather than capitalizing the first word of every line; and eliminating commas and periods, which are rarely used in poetry, unless for a specific effect.