

FHS COMMENTS 2014 5

I was moved by this poem. My initial visual reaction to the changing form was negative, but as I read it, it seemed like breath: the short gasps of the patient with end-stage COPD, the more expansive breaths his physician wished for him, and cycling back (in gratitude) to the reality of the disease.

The first stanza is a strong visual image, and true to the three “players” in this drama. The second stanza sets the scene as well as provides insights into the character of the patient. (I wished here that there was a succinct way to “show” the patient’s pride and suffering rather than simply tell us about them).

The 4th stanza offers a partial, unsatisfactory resolution to the first. I found the 4th line “now to think...” awkward, although I appreciated the echoing repetition of the symbolic word “now”; perhaps some alternative to the phrase “to think of”? Initially I was annoyed at the allusion to Giles Corey, of whom I had never heard, but after I googled him (!) I felt the reference was perfect and powerful.

The 5th stanza, essentially a prose paragraph, is the wife’s plea to save her husband. The language is raw and vernacular, but I believed it is exactly what this woman would be thinking and hoping. As above, the form is like a big inhalation and exhalation of all her yearning.

The conclusion is simple, as endings should be.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: I liked this poem. It is awkward, but no less awkward than end of life. I would favor acceptance with some minor revisions.