

FSH COMMENTS 2016 12

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: In my reading, this poem is about a callous heart surgeon and the price his wife and adult child paid as a result of his work. Many of the lines are powerful - for example, when the surgeon refers to "theater," the narrator slyly observes that he isn't talking about Shakespeare; or when the author writes of lost lives "fall[ing] down like petals pressed between pages," underlining the theme of the "book"; "his hands unseen/still moving inside these quiet hearts" (so vivid!). I liked the overall sepia tones of the poem. I especially loved the last 4 lines; and the bitter irony of the conclusion ("healthy hearts don't interest him") sums up the pain he created for his family's hearts even as he healed the pain of his patients' diseased hearts.

A few lines could be tweaked (e.g., the line about the "naked breasts...ahem" seems awkward, and not in the way the author intends; the lines about the mother and the surgeon's hands are confusing - what does it mean to be "held in the hands of his heart"?) but in general the writing is strong and emotive.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: I wrestled with this poem for a while, and it took me several readings to make sense of it. It seems to be about a callous heart surgeon and the price his wife and adult child paid as a result of his work. However, I felt it was worth the labor. Many of the lines are powerful - for example, when the surgeon refers to "theater," the narrator slyly observes that he isn't talking about Shakespeare; or when the author writes of lost lives "fall[ing] down like petals pressed between pages," underlining the theme of the "book;" "his hands unseen/stll moving inside these quiet hearts" (so vivid!). I liked the overall sepia tones of the poem. I especially loved the last 4 lines; and the bitter irony of the conclusion ("healthy hearts don't interest him") sums up the pain he created for his family's hearts even as he healed the pain of his patients' diseased hearts.

A few lines could be tweaked (e.g., the line about the "naked breasts...ahem" seems awkward, and not in the way you intend; the lines about the mother and the surgeon's hands are confusing - what does it mean to be "held in the hands of his heart"?) but in general the writing is strong and emotive.

My main concern has to do with appropriateness for the journal and interest to our readership. The poem is not focused on doctors and patients, nor on healthcare teams. It is an intensely personal poem, and as such I don't know to what extent it would speak to journal readers. On the other hand, it is about how families are affected (in this case adversely) by the profession of medicine and this perspective might be compelling. On balance, I'd take a chance on it.