

FHS COMMENTS 2019

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Although this personal essay about the personification of anxiety is filled with astonishingly good writing and embodies a creative and engaging idea, I was befuddled and confused by the introductory sentences. Who is Buer? Why are they talking philosophy? What for goodness sake does "give me back" mean? This beginning was obscure and frankly off-putting. Then I fell in love with Buer, and even developed some affection for both the panic-stricken narrator and her idealistic, sweet therapist. Some of the dialogue between Buer and narrator is just superbly crafted, a pleasure to read. Nevertheless, for this essay to realize its full potential, I think it needs considerably more work.

Here are my main recommendations:

- 1) I did not care for the title - it sounds too clinical. I'd suggest something along the lines of "Conversations with my Demon and my Therapist."
- 2) I'd suggest starting the essay with the paragraph that begins "Getting to the clinic..." Be more straightforward about the story. This is not a literary journal, and I think a clearer beginning will be more likely to engage our readership of physicians and behavioral scientists.
- 3) Be more explicit about who Buer is, allow the narrator to share that he is her anxiety. I understand that mythologically/religiously he is a demon, and that he represents the narrator's anxiety, but WHY HIM? Why this particular demon?
- 4) Be careful about how you represent Buer. Remember his main function in your narrative is to represent anxiety. So why is he spouting philosophy? I get that this was his reputation in 15th c. theology, but how does this connect with the narrator's lived experience of anxiety? If the message Buer tries to deliver is, you and your anxiety are one; or you are not alone in wrestling with anxiety, then make sure the philosophy he expresses is consistent with this message. Similarly, to me it did not make sense for Buer to advise the narrator that she "doesn't need to be just one thing." In my view, this suggests the courage to overcome your demons - hardly something the demon anxiety would say. So the behavior and speech of the demon have to be consistent not with historical theology, but with anxiety.
- 5) Another aspect of Buer that I found confusing was the reference to his being a healer. Again, I understand this is historically accurate, but how does that fit with your essay? Are you saying that even our demons are trying in some way to help us? If so, you need to make this point more clearly. Similarly, the reference to Buer not being able to heal women I cannot see as relevant to the main themes of the essay.
- 6)) The ending I think is too ambiguous. It is unclear what fire symbolizes in the concluding sentence and throughout the essay - is this a representation of hell? Or a cleansing flame kindled? Both? I don't think the essay needs to be resolved - I agree with your comment that one visit to a therapist is just the beginning of a long road - but be clear what you want the final note to be.

I made several comments in the attached edited version pointing out what struck me as discrepancies or inconsistencies. Please take a look at these as well.

I ended up really being intrigued by your essay; but it was frustrating to read as well because it did not always cohere logically, and that detracted from the very compelling writing. Please make an effort to sort out these difficulties because I think by doing so you can have a truly powerful story.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: I apologize for coming into the middle of this review process with a strong recommendation for major revision, as I appreciate how much work the author has already invested in this essay about the personification of anxiety and a visit to a therapist. Nevertheless, while it has really good potential, in my view it still needs a lot of work. I dislike the title (it sounds too clinical) and I thought the opening section was confusing even bewildering. There are also a lot of logical inconsistencies in the portrayal of Buel, especially his philosophy and some of his statements to the narrator. Finally, the concluding reference to "ignited embers" is a bit too ambiguous and needs more clarification and/or more reference points.

However, by the end of the story I was totally enamored of Buer (a truly fascinating character), and I even ended up liking the panic-stricken narrator and her sweet, although a little naïve therapist. The writing often rises to truly impressive levels and shows real craft. My conclusion is that the author should go back to the drawing board, think through more clearly the connection between the demon and the narrator's anxiety, and work to clean up the contradictions and inconsistencies that detract from the power of the narrative.