

FHS REVIEW 2022 1 and 1a

Comments to Editor:

I thought this poem was quite good. It is basically a reflection on how bipolar disorder can disrupt and devastate a relationship, in this case one between mother and young son. The strength of the poem is the conceit regarding what the mom's psychiatric disorder was called as her child was growing up - both from her rationalizing perspective and from his suffering perspective. In the final stanza, the medical system provides the appropriate diagnostic label. But in an honest twist, this is not the end, the solution - it is only another beginning. The ending is really beautiful because it acknowledges the humanity of all the actors involved - mom, son, and doctor. I appreciated the emotion of the poem, its nuance, and the compassion underlying each painful development.

The poem shows evidence of good craft, for example in the call-and-response repetition of "she called it/I called it" as well as powerful variations on this phrase ("she stopped caring if I called it anything at all"). I also thought the rhyming of the last word of each stanza's last line was effective in giving the poem a certain unity.

Occasionally the craft did not live up to the vision of the poem, but I think in easily remediable ways. There are a couple of grammar issues - "laid" instead of "lay," "apart" instead of "a part." The concluding stanza might benefit from a little wordsmithing, as I've indicated in the attached. But generally speaking, this is a well-conceived, well-written poem which I found moving and insightful. It reminded me that there is no blame where psychiatric illness is concerned, although there is plenty of hurt, and that the only hope for survival is recognizing that we are all in it together.

Comments to Author:

I liked this poem quite a bit. In my read, it is a poignant reflection on how bipolar disorder can disrupt and devastate a relationship, in this case one between mother and young son. The great strength of the poem is the conceit regarding what the mom's psychiatric disorder was called as her child was growing up - both from her rationalizing perspective and from his suffering perspective. In the final stanza, the medical system provides the appropriate diagnostic label. But in an honest twist, this is not the end, the solution - it is only another beginning. The ending is really beautiful because it acknowledges the humanity of all the actors involved - mom, son, and doctor. I appreciated the emotion of the poem, its nuance, and the compassion underlying each painful development.

I also appreciated the craft of the poem, for example in the call-and-response repetition of "she called it/I called it" as well as powerful variations on this phrase ("she stopped caring if I called it anything at all"). I also thought the rhyming of the last word of each stanza's last line was effective in giving the poem a certain unity.

Occasionally the craft did not live up to the vision of the poem, but I think in easily remediable ways. There are a couple of grammar issues - "laid" instead of "lay," "apart" instead of "a part." The concluding stanza might benefit from a little wordsmithing, as I've indicated in the attached.

Overall, this poem touched me and gave me insights into how psychiatric disease can upend a family. It reminded me that there is no blame where psychiatric illness is concerned, although there is plenty of hurt, and that the only hope for survival is recognizing that we are all in it together.

Comments to Editor:

I definitely recommend acceptance. This has evolved into a very strong and affecting poem. I make one small suggestion regarding a phrase in the first line, but honestly, I wouldn't make publication contingent on this change. The author has made revisions that improve on the original and result in an emotionally powerful piece of poetry.

Comments to Author:

I liked the earlier version quite a bit, and this version improves on the original. The lines are tighter, stronger, and more focused, all pointing to the very powerful and emotionally moving final stanza. In general, I thought the changes you made were preferable to what had existed before.

In the original poem, I was unbothered by the phrase "unaltered by the sun." However, since reviewer 1 expressed some concern about it, I also began to think about it, and realized it is a little confusing. You probably could do better - maybe "untouched by the sun" or "a refugee from the day"?

Otherwise, I wouldn't change a word. All your images wonderful examples of universal particulars - i.e., through the concrete detail, you reveal universal themes.