

suggests ways in which psychiatrists can go beyond the observation and categorisation of abnormal psychological events in an attempt to better understand the internal experiences of patients. In our case study, the composer's attitude to his characters is one that those working in the health professions would do well to emulate: he seeks to understand them, primarily by giving them the chance to speak with their own true voice.

If someone had been able to see beyond Grimes as the vicious antisocial misfit that his townspeople consider him to be, and had learnt to listen to the human being who was trying to communicate with them, perhaps he could have been helped to recover his lost sense of self. Oliver Sacks uses a musical analogy to explain what, for him, this means in practice: he describes treating each patient like a piece of music, as a complex creation that must be felt to be understood.¹³

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Poem

Hospital time

Time weaves what it touches so seamlessly
it can pass for fruit ripe for the plucking,
but here it's leased to others—
the doctor who waits and sees,
the nurse who'll be right back,
the cleaning woman whose shift will end on it.
All we know of it, lying and sitting
in this florescent light that clatters
against white walls, on
and leaves us dull and dreamless, off
is what drifts over on the airless breeze
of talk from the nurse's station.
It gathers hope of a meaning coming in
and hangs heavy but insubstantial over your bed
like phantom pain from a sawed off limb
that reaches down from its dread formless cloud
for the simple touch of finger to finger.
Guilty of health and a sliver of freedom,

I weigh the odds of missing rounds
against a coffee run or stealing a moment
outside where light and time are one
to drink in and be drunk with.
But I've forfeited a million seconds
from my own brief account! I comfort myself,
to be here and, perhaps, be touched by the memory
of a childhood malady you might have had
or a distant cousin's rare affliction
that will shine a light on your mystery
and give you a shot at many million more beats
before the last one that, in any case, comes for us all.

M Rowe

Correspondence to: Dr M Rowe, Yale School of Medicine, 205 Whitney Avenue, Suite 306, New Haven, CT 06511, USA; michael.rowe@yale.edu

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