

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.<sup>13</sup>

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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.

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