one hand the honour of your leaders demanded a release. But fear of
the consequences easily won the day: my army might be situated
on the outskirts awaiting a signal to attack.

In the end you set up, hurriedly, a mock court which proceeded to
sentence me to death for: treason, incestuous polygamy (whatever
that means) and other serious offences. I was to burn at the stake
as a blasphemer and a barbarian. But you begged me to become
a Christian. You believed that if my body survived, then I could rise
next morning, if necessary.

“So you see I decided to return to Poland” I said in a quiet voice to
the taxi driver. I only bought a small adidas backpack and a tennis
racquet. We were on the way to the Marriott Hotel. “Where have
you come from right now?” the taxi driver seemed somewhat
alarmed.

“Lately?”

“Yeah”

“...I don’t really know...I don’t remember everything”

“...but surely...”

“I only remember that when we last met I died in Cajamarca. And
you died shortly afterwards. Murdered in Lima perhaps...”

“And why did you return here and now to find me in such a
manner?”

“Cometh the hour cometh the man.”

The taxi driver halted as we approached the Marriott. I gave him
a large tip and moved towards the glass revolving doors of the
hotel. At the last moment I turned back and headed towards my
taxi again. The taxi driver lowered his window and I said to him:
“you should have burned me when you had the chance!”

It was amazing that the patient had accurately retold the
story of Atahualpa while also describing his own internal expe-
rience of illness. The fluency of thought common to hypomania
and creativity has long been recognised. Krapelin noted in 1921
that many of his patients would spontaneously start writing
poetry while manic.2 This example is striking in that encapsu-
lates some of the grandiose and slightly paranoid delusional
beliefs experienced by the patient during his worst period of
illness, which at the time he was unable to express to mental
health professionals. It also highlights the patient’s recovery and
return to more coherent thought processes (even down to the
change of title in the edited version). The clinician should try to
use all elements of a patient’s presentation to understand their
experiences. This should include poetry, artwork and music,
which give insight into the patient’s mental state as well
providing therapeutic benefit during their production. The recent
introduction of computerised notes systems threatens to eradi-
cate this useful and interesting way information can be elicited
from psychiatric patients.

Competing interest None.

Patient consent Obtained.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; not externally peer reviewed.

REFERENCES
2. Jamison KR. A magical orange grove in a nightmare: Creativity and
1999.

Poem

Abraham (with apologies to Percy Bysshe Shelley—a
homage to his poem Ozymandias)

I met a university president on his campus
Who said: Two vast and trunkless curriculum reports
Stand in your faculty. Near them in the dean’s office,
Half sunk, a shattered curriculum lies, whose supports,
And content sneer of cold command,
Tell that its writer well those passions read
Which yet survive, objectives found in these lifeless things,
The exams that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the website these words appear:
“I am the curriculum, will make you a doctor, king of kings:
Look on my content, ye mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside can compete. Round the trainees
Of that colossal work, boundless and bare
The lone and level patients stretch far away.

Ian Scott

Correspondence to Dr Ian Scott, University of British Columbia, David Strangway Building, Suite 300-5950 University
Boulevard, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1Z3, Canada; ianscott@interchange.ubc.ca

Competing interests None.

Contributors I wrote this article as a homage to Shelley. It draws on his original poem Ozymandias.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; not externally peer reviewed.

Published Online First 26 February 2011

J Med Ethics; Medical Humanities 2011;37:52. doi:10.1136/jmh.2011.007237