



The poet-physician's note and the plastic surgeon's note

Kun Hwang

Ethics Editor, *Archives of Plastic Surgery*
Department of Plastic Surgery, Inha University College of Medicine, Incheon, Korea



“You lethargic, waiting upon me, waiting for the fire and I attend upon you, shaken by your beauty. Shaken by your beauty. Shaken.”—*Paterson* by William Carlos Williams

I recently enjoyed watching a movie entitled “Paterson” (starring Adam Driver, directed by Jim Jarmusch). A bus driver, whose name is Paterson, works in the city of Paterson in New Jersey. During pauses, he writes poems in a notebook (Fig. 1). His wife, Laura, loves his poems and tries to persuade him to publish them or at least make copies. He finally promises to make copies of the poems, but their dog rips up his notebook, destroying his poems. Sad and depressed, he goes for a walk and sits down at Great Falls, his favorite site. There, a Japanese man sits beside him and they talk about poetry after Paterson notices that the man is reading the poem *Paterson* written by William Carlos Williams. Although the driver Paterson denies it, the Japanese man thinks that Paterson himself is a poet and gives him an empty notebook as a gift. Paterson begins to write a poem in his new notebook.

After enjoying the movie “Paterson,” I turned to the book-length poem *Paterson* and learned about the poet William Carlos Williams (1883–1963). He was a Puerto Rican-American poet, writer, and physician. His primary occupation was a general physician and a pediatrician; however, he was a successful poet as well as a painter. He practiced medicine by day and wrote at night.

People asked him: “Do you have time to write while continuing your treatment? You must be a superman with at least two energies.” He replied: “The two are two parts of one, not each of

the other. The two complement each other. When one part wears me out, the other part makes me rest” [1]. For him, medicine was a leap forward to becoming a poet, and at the same time, poetry was the driving force of his role as a doctor, as exemplified by his confession stating “I cannot practice medicine without poetry.”

The poet-physician’s *Autobiography* brought me to the topic of plastic surgeons’ notes.

When I visited the Hunterian Museum in London, I had the chance to see some relics belonging to Thomas Pomfret Kilner (1890–1964), who established the V-Y pushback palatoplasty (Wardill-Kilner-Veau method) in 1937. The BAPRAS (British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive, and Aesthetic Surgeons) archive room of the Royal College of Surgeons had Kilner’s drafts of papers, pictures of the patients he operated upon, schemas submitted to journals, and his handwritten notes. Only one drawing of palatoplasty was drawn by pencil. Interestingly, it was not made in an ordinary notebook, but was drawn on the reverse side of a letter envelope from the Queen’s Hotel, Birmingham. It is therefore thought that Dr. Kilner got an idea when he was staying at that hotel. Before the vivid idea went away, he sketched a schema on the nearest paper, the letter envelope [2].

Since my training period, which started 35 years ago, I have written my operative records myself or at least reviewed those that my residents make before I sign them. Alongside the official operative records, I have empty note papers upon which I write or draw to prepare for operations that I think will involve complicated procedures. Just after surgery, I fill the space with the steps of procedures I did and my regrets regarding the opera-



Fig. 1. Paterson, a bus driver writes poems in a notebook in a movie "Paterson" (starring Adam Driver, directed by Jim Jarmusch, 2016).

tion. When such operative notes are collected, they can be the basis of case reports, idea and innovation reports, case series, or even original articles.

The human brain is like molten bronze that should be poured into a mold. When inspired, ideas should be written or drawn before they disappear. This is why Dr. Williams and Dr. Kilner seized their ideas in a moment.

NOTES

Conflict of interest

Kun Hwang is an editorial board member of the journal but was not involved in the peer reviewer selection, evaluation, or decision process of this article. No other potential conflicts of interest relevant to this article were reported.

ORCID

Kun Hwang <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1994-2538>

REFERENCES

1. Williams WC. The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams. New York: W. W. Norton & Company; 1951.
2. Hwang K. Meet Dr Kilner at the Hunterian Museum. *J Craniofac Surg* 2017;28:1402-3.

Correspondence: Kun Hwang
Department of Plastic Surgery, Inha University College of Medicine, 27 Inhang-ro, Jung-gu, Incheon 22332, Korea

Tel: +82-32-890-3514, Fax: +82-32-890-2918, E-mail: jokerhg@inha.ac.kr

This study was supported by a grant from National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2020R11-1A2054761).

Received: April 14, 2021 • Revised: May 24, 2021 • Accepted: May 25, 2021

pISSN: 2234-6163 • eISSN: 2234-6171

<https://doi.org/10.5999/aps.2021.00717> • Arch Plast Surg 2021;48:345-346
