

Anatomy Creative Projects I 2009

Dear [REDACTED], I am one of the faculty members participating in the review of the anatomy creative projects this year. It was very interesting to read a reflection from someone so well-versed in anatomical dissection (albeit not primarily human). You obviously bring a wealth of experience and skills to this course. Yet nothing ever quite prepares you for the dissection of the human cadaver, does it? I also appreciated your sense of humor. Perhaps because of it, I suspect that the double-entendre of your last sentence is not an accident; and that in addition to the over-achieving medical students who surround you, there are other new people who fill you with equal trepidation – i.e., the cadavers themselves! Thanks for sharing your thoughts. Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], I am one of the faculty members participating in the review of the anatomy creative projects this year. I feel very fortunate to have been assigned your reflection. Your insights are profound. The exchange with your boyfriend epitomizes the way medical training inevitably separates you from “normal” people. Most non-doctor types cannot fully understand what it’s like to be a doctor – and this is okay, so long as you don’t stop trying to convey your experiences to the people you care about. Otherwise, the person you’re becoming becomes less and less known to those who are supposed to know you best.

For what it’s worth, it makes perfect sense to me that the presence of a cadaver triggers thoughts about one’s own mortality. I think it’s wonderful and important, rather than morbid, that you are asking such questions. I very much like your analogies – both that looking at death is like looking at the stars, reminding us of our own smallness and impermanence in the scheme of things; and also that the connection with a cadaver can be understood as partner dancing – strangers united by a devotion to a certain pursuit. It takes devotion to donate one’s body; and it takes equal devotion to dissect this body. What impressed me in particular about this analogy is the insight that *lack* of intimacy on many dimensions does not preclude significant intimacy and connection where it counts.

Good luck with the remainder of the course. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hello [REDACTED], I am one of the faculty members participating in the review of the anatomy creative projects this year. Thank you for such an insightful poem. I liked your decision to use the first person voice of the cadaver; and thus choose to see through her eyes. From this perspective, your poem became a fascinating meditation on intimacy and its limits. I particularly enjoyed the phrase “we become brutal comfortable.” This seems the perfect description of the “relationship” most students establish with the cadaver. Interestingly, your cadaver gives you permission (which makes sense, given that body donation is a voluntary choice in this country) to pursue your learning on and within her body. I wonder if the narrator’s acceptance of whatever happened to her body helped you

to find that “secure distance” for which you were searching. Your poem captured beautifully this ongoing struggle. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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Hello, ██████, I am one of the faculty members participating in the review of the anatomy creative projects this year. I appreciated your conceit that the cadaver was having second thoughts about what he'd gotten himself into! I've often wondered, even if the donors meticulously read the consent information, do they *really* understand what will happen to their body? It's a disquieting thought! Still, I liked the evolution in the cadaver's attitude that you imagined. Through the cadaver's eyes, you showed very well the enthusiasm and eagerness (if not always precision :-)) with which you and your lab partner approached the dissection of the heart; and the fact that his is the heart you will always “think of first.” I think this will be true. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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██████, I am one of the faculty members participating in the review of the anatomy creative projects this year, and I feel very fortunate to have received your poem. It was a touching act of imagination to reveal, through the cadaver's voice, not only the lifeless cadaver that lies before the student, but also the child, the man, the father, and the dynamic, every-changing gift that he represents. I particularly liked the repetition of the line, “Look at my body...” Through the cadaver, you invite your medical student self to look, look, look, look. Looking deeply at the cadaver can reveal a great deal, as your poem so well expresses. It is by not turning away that understanding begins. Thank you for this work. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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Hi ██████, I am one of the faculty members participating in the review of the anatomy creative projects this year. I thought you wrote a wonderful essay. The last line will stay with me a long time. It was striking how much of life those hot pink nails evoked for you. I wonder if it is not misguided to try to “forget” the cadavers' humanness. They are certainly no longer human beings, but it is also true that they were once very much alive, as evidenced by those vivid nails. How can we honor that truth, without becoming overwhelmed by it? I don't know, but I'm glad you didn't look away from your cadaver's nails. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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██████, I am one of the faculty members who works with Dr. Leonard to review the anatomy creative projects, and I'm so glad I was assigned yours! What a great poem! It is a wonderful work of imagination, and its organizing metaphor (the cigarette as a southern sun) is fantastic – original and compelling. One of the things I liked best about the poem is the way it penetrates to the ineffable allure of smoking – far beyond the mechanistic “nicotine addiction” that we use as explanation. Your poem shows smoking as companionship, playfulness, and love – and this psychological, emotional dimension is certainly an important component of the resistance to quitting. Perhaps this southern belle chose her life and her death... Thanks for this fine work, Dr. Shapiro

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██████████, I am one of the faculty members participating in the review of the anatomy creative projects this year. I enjoyed your poem – all your rather nervous preparations and anticipations of the big day; and most particularly, your delight in your newfound nerdiness. I hope anatomy will delight and surprise you in many ways, and that you will continue to flourish in this role :-). Best, Dr. Shapiro

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Hi ██████████, I am one of the faculty members participating in the review of the anatomy creative projects this year. I was intrigued by the way your essay tackled the question of knowing. How do we “know” someone else? What constitutes knowing? You’ve already learned a great deal about this woman, and you’ve learned *from* her as well. I found your attitude toward your own training to be very humble: “. . . just a Ph.D. student.” Your appreciation for the cadaver, your eagerness to learn, your sense of respectful fascination convince me that the cadaver would be very satisfied that you were her dissector. Much good luck with the rest of the course. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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██████████ I am one of the faculty members working with Dr. Leonard to review this year’s creative projects, and fortunately I was assigned yours. . I liked the way you used the drop in a pond metaphor to represent the progressive “imperfection” of the cadaver. And then that magnificently incongruous phrase “wonderfully mutilated.” What a hopeful and splendid way to describe the process of dissection. The elaboration seems to suggest that paring, peeling, carving away the body leaves behind a pure essence – and it is through this transmutation that “the unsightly becomes beautiful.” I also appreciated the way the poem juxtaposed the vitality of the students with the disintegration of the cadaver. A thought-provoking and creative effort, Eric! Thank you. Dr. Shapiro

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Hi ██████████, I am one of the faculty members working with Dr. Leonard to review this year’s creative projects. I found your acknowledgment of the inevitable uncomfortable questions and feelings that arise in the anatomy lab thoughtful and insightful. There are a lot of uncomfortable questions and feelings that accompany the process of becoming a doctor (as well as of course many uplifting, joyful feelings – but these are a lot easier to deal with :-)). For some people, this might be a bad thing, and something they might decide to avoid, either by leaving the profession entirely, or by just “pretending” they aren’t feeling anything. My view is that it is precisely through these questions and emotions that students can get the most out of doctoring, and simultaneously make themselves into the most aware and prepared physicians that they can be. From your reflective essay, it is clear to me that you are ready to plunge into medicine at all levels. I wish you good luck! Best, Dr. Shapiro

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Dear ██████████, I am one of the faculty members working with Dr. Leonard to review this year’s creative projects, and luckily I was assigned your poem. It was a pleasure to read it again. I was struck again by the wise, reassuring words of the cadaver, who implicitly

invites the tentative student to think about his soul as well as his organs. And the lessons he teaches are the ones that will endure throughout your entire career in medicine – not to be afraid, to be respectful, and to be grateful. If you can achieve these things, you will find doctoring to be a rich and rewarding profession. Best, Dr. Shapiro