

██████████ (poem about tattooed cadaver)

Hi ██████████. Because of my interest in applications of humanities and arts to medical education, Dr. Leonard allowed me to review the anatomy creative projects. What a wonderful poem you wrote! Its specificity and detail (the mermaid on the deltoid) brought this cadaver to life (excuse the pun), as did your and fantasies about his worries and inspirations, and the annoyances of his daily existence (jealous girlfriend?). By switching from third to second person in the last stanza you made a lovely move closer toward this body "motionless on a steel table." The final phrase, mimicking the previous stanza's concluding line, as well as the cliché "moment by moment" was a great way of getting the reader to think about how we "measure" the passing of time and the approach of our own mortality. A very appropriate meditation to emerge from gross anatomy lab!

██████████ ("My Teacher" poem)

I liked your creating a "dialogue" with your cadaver, and the way you imagined his or her life filled with love and beauty. Your vow to remember this "first patient" with awe and respect is an important one. I loved the idea that this "teacher" would "bless" each future patient. What a wonderful way to express the interconnectedness of us all. Hold that thought!

██████████ ("Anatomy" poem)

Great poem. It's very effective in jumping back and forth between an inanimate skeleton and a living, loving human being. It also takes a foundational skill of medicine, namely touch, and explores all that can be revealed when the physician is "touched" by the patient's life. Also, because of the images created by the poem, although you never say so directly, the "touch" you extend toward your cadaver appears at once gentle and respectful. Great ending line that begs the questions, "What is seeing anyway?" and "How can a physician really see his or her patients?" Good work.

██████████ ("First Day in Anatomy Lab" essay)

Hi ██████████. I enjoyed your meditation on "first day of anatomy lab." Really good observation of your own sensations, emotions, and thoughts. That quality of close attention will stand you in very good stead when you start to figure out what is going on with patients. I also appreciated your awareness of *simultaneous and contradictory* emotions. The practice of medicine, the relationships between doctor and patient are rarely only one thing or another, but rather are more likely a complex conglomeration of many often conflicting realities. Careful and nonjudgmental awareness will help you understand and be comfortable with these phenomena. Your last line struck me very forcibly. Keep making promises to yourself and your patients. It's that willingness to commit wholeheartedly that makes a truly fine physician.

██████████ ("Anatomy and Humanism" essay)

Hi ██████████. I appreciated this thoughtful, insightful reflection on the relationship between science and humanism. Your concluding sentence said it well: the practice of medicine is a constant balancing of closeness and distance. If you keep the patient tenderly juxtaposed between these two poles, I think all will be well.

██████████ ("My Vida Loca" poem)

Hi ██████████. I enjoyed this poem. Perhaps not surprisingly, the "emptiness" of the cadaver (the "cavity") leads naturally to thoughts about the "fullness" of life, the soaring, flying, guiding spirit. One can only agree with you that we are all of us trapped in the mystery of our crazy lives.

██████████ ("Making an acquaintance" essay)

What an intriguing approach to consider that you are "making the acquaintance" of your cadaver. I found it fascinating that, based on your obviously restricted contact, you were able (tentatively) to deduce so many qualities about this individual. This ability to pay careful attention to patients, and then think imaginatively about what they have taught you, is one of the sign-posts of a skillful clinician. A very creative and insightful essay.

██████████ ("Death and the Dead" essay)

Hi ██████████. I liked the way you wrote this essay. By speaking directly to the reader, you engage us viscerally. I am right there, walking by your side, seeing through your eyes. The whole metaphor of an art gallery brought into immediate focus the relationship between art and medicine in a very thought-provoking and original way. And the actual images you evoked were quite beautiful - vivid, touching, even humorous. I loved that the whole experience put you in "a surprisingly good mood." This juxtaposition of exposure to death and a kind of pleasant peacefulness perfectly conveys the unexpected reassurance and relief you experienced in anatomy lab.

██████████ ("The red heart" poem)

Hi ██████████. I really enjoyed this poem. Of course I'm a big fan of William Carlos Williams, and this is a fine tribute to that physician-poet. The concreteness of your images perfectly captures the heart both as an organ and a metaphor. Nice work!

██████████ ("Who are you?" poem)

Hi ██████████. You wrote a really well-crafted poem, and managed to use meter and rhyme scheme in a way that enhanced, rather than detracted from, the seriousness of your message. The dialogue between the "unknown scholar" and the cadaver is both effective and touching. The dissected body springs to life and becomes a wise guide, encouraging both gentleness and steadfastness. Lots of lovely language that hearkens back to an earlier, but perhaps more dignified, time in medicine (and in life) and really works.

██████████ (poem about encounters with the body growing up)

Hi ██████████. I thought this was a truly terrific piece of writing. It sings of the enduring fascination of the body, yet reaches far beyond to the theological and spiritual implications (or not). That it does so through incredibly well-observed, harshly honest "mini-tales" makes this journey toward self, others, and "ourselves" irresistible. The structure of the poem is subtle, but very effective. The concluding image is compelling and powerful. All in all, a poem I won't easily forget.

██████████ ("Lesson 1" – poem)

Hi ██████████. Thank you for this skillfully written and moving poem. It is a fine meditation on the relationship between science and humanism, and all the distancing mechanisms we use to push away death and its handmaidens. And you're right, it's easier to think about pathology than pain, less threatening to memorize the anatomy than contemplate the effects of chemo. If the first (and perhaps necessary) lesson is to "stare down" death, then perhaps succeeding lessons need to help us "recognize" death, not only as the enemy, but as an old acquaintance.

██████████ ("Crisscross Thoughts" - poem)

I agree, dissecting dead bodies does produce "criss-cross" thoughts – and emotions (great term, by the way!). It is humorous, and inspiring, and repellant, and noble – also anxiety-producing, uplifting, and boring. You pick up some nice ironies – a body filled with

organs that no longer work, students engaging in behavior that in any other context would be criminal, learning that is dependent on death. Life is pretty strange. Thanks for sharing your thoughts.

██████████ (“Rage” – poem)

Nice shades of Dylan Thomas in this poem. This is a very creative insight – that the altruistic donation of one’s body to medical science may be rooted in rage as much as in generosity. Interesting thought. It doesn’t take away from the selflessness of this final act, but it does hint at the complexity of human motivation. It also suggests that negative emotions, such as anger, can be transmuted into great goodness if they are worked with carefully. A good lesson to keep in mind as your medical training progresses!

██████████ (“To Know a Stranger” – poem)

I liked all the questions you directed at your cadaver. I hope you can keep this attitude of respectful and compassionate curiosity in the presence of living patients, who will be able to answer your questions if you show an interest.

██████████ (“Revelations on Death” – poem)

Your meditation on the nature of life and death reminds me of the epigrammatic tale, in which Chuang-tse, a great Buddhist sage, wonders upon seeing a butterfly: “Am I Chuang-tse, or I am the butterfly, dreaming I am Chuang-tse?” I think it’s never a bad idea to keep a flexible attitude toward the fundamental mysteries of the universe. As a physician, steeped in the latest scientific knowledge, it’s easy to conclude you understand everything, but often the more we know, the less we understand. Keep up your philosophical ponderings!

██████████ (“I am about to meet...” – poem)

In this lovely poem you take the risk of exploring all the connections you have with this unknown cadaver – woman, grandmother, mother, self. It is all too easy to do the opposite, focusing on all the differences between us and the sick, suffering patient. Empathy, the ability to see other as self, can be scary because it makes us realize that not only could we be “them,” but that in some ways we are already “them.” It can also be incredibly humanizing. Good for you for venturing into this dangerous but rewarding territory.

██████████ (“A gift in life and in death...” poem)

This thoughtful address emphasizes that your cadaver may teach you more than information, more than knowledge, in fact has a profound wisdom to convey if you look deeply into those sightless eyes.

██████████ (“A Moment in Life” – poem)

██████████, I liked the double entendre of your title. This poem describes a moment in life, as you contemplate the body of your cadaver, but it also reminds us that we only have a moment in life, before we vacate the premises to “live elsewhere. Your poem reminds me of the inextricable intertwining of body, mind, and soul that makes up a human being. What a mystery!