

## LITERATURE AND MEDICINE ELECTIVE FINAL PROJECTS

### Don

Hi Don, just wanted to comment how much I enjoyed hearing your poem read out loud. It generated a vibrant discussion, didn't it? I'm glad people spoke up. I think initially they were afraid they'd "say the wrong thing" (as if that were possible), but when they warmed up, it was obvious your imagery had really engaged them. I still really liked the double meaning of "mad scientist," and obviously I'm fascinated by the contrast between the brutality of dissection (and of course surgery, and many aspects of medicine) and the desire to serve and do good. Trying to reconcile this dichotomy can make anyone feel a bit mad (both frustrated and a little crazy!). This is very strong writing.

It was a pleasure to have you in class, and even in the space of the last few days of teaching, I've been monitoring my "directive" style to see how I can modulate it. So thanks for the feedback ( Best, Dr. Shapiro

### David

David, just wanted to thank you for contributing your early reflections on anatomy to the discussion yesterday. Many heads were nodding, you really struck a chord (actually several!). It's interesting to look back and see how those initial feelings of fear, doubt, and anxiety have changed. I appreciated your comment about the "cycle" of emotions – attachment, detachment, reattachment (sounds vaguely like a limb!). I thought this was very insightful – there is a season for everything, yes? In the OR, the surgeon is focused on excision or construction or amputation, on the technical job. But something is lost if post-surgery, that doc is unable to reconnect with the person of the patient. I also liked the reminder that anatomy should be a memento mori, a reminder of death, a way to both become more familiar with, yet detached from, our final ending. I think doctors who have wrestled with this aspect of medicine (I heard a doctor say once, "It's so depressing, in the end we always lose" – NOT the best frame, from my perspective!) end up better able to serve their patients, so in my view you are asking exactly the right questions.

It was such a pleasure to have you in class. I always valued your sensitive and thoughtful comments. I know you are still dealing with your grandmother's death. That is something you will never get past (nor should you), but I promise it will take its proper place in your life. I wish you best of luck next year. Warmly, Dr. Shapiro

### Nguyen

your very beautiful pastel sketch. Unfortunately, I don't have any special art background, but even my untrained eye can see that you are a very talented artist. The title of the piece helped me interpret it a lot. What struck me initially was how you rendered indescribably beautiful the interior of the body cavity. Yet coupling this awareness with the title, I realized that what I was viewing had (to my untrained eyes) almost nothing to do with a "person". In this sense, anatomy both reveals aspects of our literal selves that most of us are completely ignorant of; yet it also distorts and destroys the recognizable human. This juxtaposition of discovery and destruction I found very compelling, and full of implications for your future relationship with living patients. Congratulations on such a strong piece. Dr. Shapiro

Nguyen, so glad you found your terrific sketch. It was very helpful to hear you discuss it in class, and I particularly liked what you said about wanting to help your fellow students see these organs from a different perspective. I agreed with what Samantha said – it did look like a flower, and this “naturalness” reminded me that our mortal bodies “bloom and fade” like flowers, and that this is part of a natural cycle. Thank you! I enjoyed having you in class, and wish you all the best for next year. Dr. Shapiro

### **Samantha**

All I can say is, you nailed it! I was so impressed when I heard you read this poem. As I’ve said, poetry is subjective, different people can like or not like the same poem, but in my opinion, your poem is just great! I love the way you work within the metaphor of giants (and this yielded the beauty of the last two lines), I love the ambiguity of giants, I love the unexpected reversal in those last lines (after all the insecurity and worry, discovering that your “size” has a significant advantage :-). All in all, this is such a wonderful piece of work, I really encourage you to submit it a few places, and will be glad to suggest some outlets if you’d like.

That is all about the “craft” of the poem. Even more important to me is its theme. Medicine is a wonderful profession, but it often breeds arrogance (Anne Sexton, the great poet, once wrote that “Doctors should fear arrogance more than cardiac arrest”). Your poem, by contrast, is highlights humbleness, and eventually recognizes it is a crucial virtue.

Samantha, I really enjoyed getting to know you a bit this year. You were always engaged in our discussions, and your remarks were thoughtful, perceptive – and yes humble! :-). Please stay in touch, especially if you continue to write more poems :-). Wishing you all the best, Dr. Shapiro

### **Chris**

Dear Chris, thank you for sharing your linked haiku(-like) poems with the class. You are a strong writer, and I hope you keep on writing (for some, it is also a way of surviving medical school :-)). Many of these short verses moved me deeply – the opening one about mortality waiting in the basement, “Stardust,” the lover’s touch, the concluding image of the sunflower. Others, such as “My saw blade,” “Why should I appreciate,” and the one about the scavenger hunt were appalling in their anger, but in precisely the right way, and I loved these too. The beauty of such brevity is that it is all about a single image captured in few words – your images cut right to the heart (sorry for anatomy metaphor).

I appreciated having you as part of this group. Your comments were always spot on, and never more so than yesterday, where I felt your humanities background coming to the fore, and providing insightful interpretations of your colleagues’ work. Thanks for sticking with us. I wish you a great summer and a survivable second year (. Best, Dr. Shapiro