

WRITING: BODIES, WOUNDS, TRANSCENDENCE

*Take a poem, look at what it is and what it does. Scan the words, the lines until the poetics abstract the text into something beautiful. Now look in a mirror; notice the curvatures in your body. I see containment. I see openings. Call what pours out of them writings, the colors, sounds, memories, emotions; call them greenhouses, open doors, births (Rodenbeck, *A Lovely Little Journal*).*

BOTANY AND BODY

“What is it like being a poet?” you ask,

and I can’t find the words to

explain.

In every single particle within me,

I feel the softness and hard edges of a deep greenness.

I am completely full

of plant guts and bloomed thoughts;

they waterfall from me.

I have moss in my eyes,

vines engrossing the thinness of my ribs and spine,

philodendrons for hands.

When botany is coaxed,

it slips and slides out of me

like satin being pulled from a bolt of fabric.

I ache.

What's left is a poet,

what's left is aliveness,

ways in which the world can become ethereal.

"Isn't it draining making unbeautiful things beautiful?"

You implore.

I fall into that question mark

because grazing it isn't enough.

I want to tell you why,

I want to open the greenhouse.

Reading and writing are acts that a body does, but most forget that writing is in itself bodily. Take a simple essay structure for example: An introductory paragraph as the head, the aptly named body paragraphs, the conclusion paragraph that is a distanced, full look at the entirety of the piece's appearance. Poems have feet, research can have headings and footnotes; moreover, all writing has organs, metaphysical inner workings that pump life into the work. When a person reads, it is like consuming bodily flesh—violent and nourishing.

STRANGE EXISTENCE

I used to write love poems about someone in my freshman year English class. The writing was so serious, so twisted up in my feelings for someone else. I simply wanted to communicate what I couldn't say out loud. That's what I thought poems were: an extension of my soul.

What I found out is that my love poems weren't actually good. They had no sense of poetics, no bones to hold them up. I didn't win a creative writing scholarship my senior year of high school after laboring over a collection of poems and stories about the complexities of love. I opened the email with the results as I was waiting for my mom to come out of the public

restrooms at a shopping mall. I felt heavy, useless, unsuccessful. I still went to college to study English, planning to write poetry because it was all I knew.

Like most college students, my friends and I liked to get together to drink because the nefarious edge of danger was exciting. One particular time, we were too tipsy for a Wednesday night, wine pushing us past familiarity. We discussed books despite me being the only writer there and my friend Karissa told us that she had a book that smelled sweet. She passed around an old copy of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and we inhaled the scent of it. Joking, we exclaimed that we should taste it to see if it was actually like sugar. And I did: I ripped off a corner, placed the piece of the blond page onto my tongue, and it tasted of sweet vanilla. We laughed and moved on, but the taste lingered on my tongue; it was as if I were pressing my tongue into the mouth of someone, something else.

That night, as I wrestled with crumpled sheets and knitted blankets for the simple drip of sleep, I couldn't stop thinking about how that page tasted so sweet. I had ripped off a bit of paper and let it dissolve like sex in my watering mouth. How can words take up so much more space than I intended? I thought about Wordsworth's lines about twinkling stars and daffodils, how different those pages must taste. I felt like my insides were ochre, milky, twinkling.

I woke up the next morning still drowsy. My partner came over and asked me how I was. How could I articulate my inward explosion? I had licked a vanilla body of words the night before and I didn't feel guilty. This is when I finally began to understand that poems, stories, pages are living, pulsing, undulating creatures. And they were inside of me, never to leave.

Spot the points of pain on your nakedness. To have wounds, one must have a body. Being able to pour oneself on a page is a strictly human gesture. People don't know why they do it, or even

how. Writing is a wound, so it bleeds, pulses, remains open for someone else to touch, sink in.

Wounds require bodies.

OPENNESS

The wounds, they shapeshift

into the paintings my mother loves

into the paintings my lover loves

into the paintings my mother loves

Eyes articulate openness:

Consciousness through round handles, cold at night

Twist the knobs and open the door

Twist the knobs and open the downpour

Twist the knobs and open the door

Swallowing paint chips hurt:

haunting like the horizon, salty, canvases to cry

Into us

Into my body

Into us

The wounds, they hemorrhage.

Writing is best when it embraces the openness of its intrinsic wounds, when the body is kept in consideration, when the wounds are allowed to bleed. The relationship between writer and reader is intimate, naked, consuming. Writing is the embodiment of wounds and a willingness to tell stories with the ephemeral time we have.

want to snuggle in close
 and sometimes I
 feel animated, a day
 mention version of
 a girl why don't ya
 wanna lump our clays
 together and hide away
 from the world just ya
 and me and the cer-
 mentary I'm in long
 to come on too slow
 and that's why no
 one else wants to
 kiss my kerens
 Tell me what you'll
 rock my think my
 I can't be this torn
 up anymore please just
 kiss me a little and put
 me at ease with you
 own same music are more

Found note by Lizzie Stacks, a window-pane of
 words pleading for touch, an opening for
 vulnerability to seep out.

A writer has personal aesthetics and poetics, but a writer should never forget where the words
 come from: the locations of vulnerabilities found in and out of the body. Even the most famous
 poets know that the body is the core, they just know how to extrapolate their openings until they
 flood the page.

CONVERSATION W/ OCEAN VUONG

I think it was “I believe the wound is also the place where the skin reenounters itself, asking of each end, where have you been?” Does that sound right?

I just mean that healing comes after wounds and new understandings are reached after that healing is finished. I only feel this through my writing

No, never. My poems are bandages, like gauze wrapping around the stories of my blood.

Ocean, what was that thing you said about wounds in your book *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*?

Yes! That's so lovely, but it kind of goes over my head a bit... What do you mean by that?

Don't your hands get tired of sewing up wounds with words?



Found painting from Danyion Reagan, a koi fish with a body that looks like wounds, red and splotchy. It can still swim; we can still write.

Looking beneath the surface of our dermis, we find the pain of the wounds of trauma and experience and knowledge. Why won't they scab over, become solid, become history? They won't and even putting words on a page won't get rid of them completely. Realize that these locations are the spaces that encourage both tangible and intangible communication to another person, asking for interpretation. Place your seething palm on someone else's and they will know why you bleed.

ANZALDUA'S TRANSCENDENCE

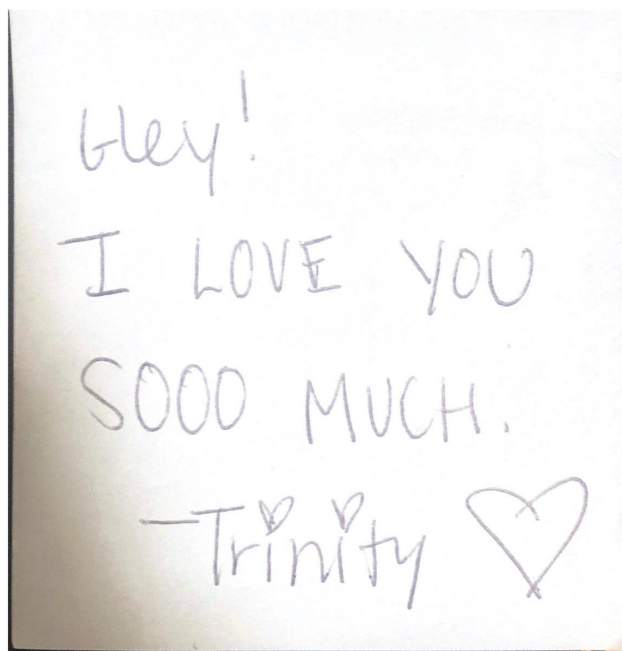
In chapter six of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldua divulges how she began to write as a young girl, the significance and influence her culture has on her writing, the corporeal engagement she has with the act of writing. She describes writing as a sensuous act, stating that the words interact with her body in visceral ways: "Daily, I battle the silence and the red. Daily I take my throat in my hands and squeeze until the cries pour out, my larynx and soul sore from the constant struggle." (Anzaldua, 93-94). She posits that there is corporeal labor that is intrinsic to the writing as it exhumes trauma and emotion in her.

Later, she describes that writing feels like she is "carving bone", that the "soul makes itself through the creative act" (Anzaldua, 95). The creative act that Anzaldua is suggesting is no more complicated than composing writing; yet, the implications on parsing out emotions and ideations on the body through this act of creating is important. The body has the capability to etherealize and concretize the inner workings of this location of containment, but there is an intrinsic struggle necessary to achieve them.

Indeed, Anzaldua knows that sacrifice must be made in the act of composition. She writes, "...only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed" (Anzaldua, 97). A large part of this book is the discussion of how living in the borderlands with the mestiza identity is like living in an "open wound", which can simultaneously be active bridge-building. This is to say that Anzaldua argues that consciousness

of identity can be transcendent and transformative, and through artistic composition, one can reach this consciousness, and can possibly transcend things like subject-object duality that cultivate binaries. This chapter in particular supports the idea that understanding wounds can be beneficial for finding consciousness. Writing can be the next step, but the acknowledgment of the body and the wounds they intrinsically hold is vital: "...for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body..." (Anzaldua, 97). People have open wounds, but they are a way inside, a way to communicate with each other through corporeal engagement. After this transcendence is achieved through the creative act of composition, the intimate experience of transferring consciousness can be done.

Bleed and writhe; bleed and write. A writer sacrifices their body, a reader absorbs it through their eyes. This sensuous, corporeal act of writing is beautiful because it creates a blood connection.



Found note from Trinity Stevenson, a quick jotting of emotion. Through just four words, love and kindness can be transferred; that's all writing is, isn't it, a transferral of substance?

Words are both the wounds and the bandage; writing contains multitudes, can function in many reconciliatory ways. Words can become much more than pain and suffering. They can become expressions of healing.

SUTURES

I have made many mistakes that can't simply be reconciled through poems, despite my intense desire that they are. Last April, I pushed my partner to the edge after months of fighting, and his right hand furrowed into a fist and dove into the mirror hanging near the vanity in the apartment he lived in. He sat on the edge of the tub spewing droplets of red and I cried. He didn't want me to take him to the hospital, but I insisted. I stayed outside in my car thinking that this must be the last of us. When he came back, I saw the suture braided atop his index finger, towing inwards to make erect, to keep it unbent.

Later, he asked me to help him shave after hours of silence sinking with the dusk outside. I held a razor to his face, chin, neck, and swiped away yesterday's follicles. I looked at the finished job and his cleanness crumbled onto me. There was still blood in the tub just to our right. I hadn't stopped shaking and I tried to make sure that there weren't any shards of glass left in the carpet.

We laid in bed, quiet and sad. We slept. I dreamed of a time when afternoons were easy and wide like meadows. I suddenly awoke knowing that stitches only fix some openings. I imagined yellow flowers growing from his knuckle gashes, how lovely they would look scissor-snipped like loose threads. I wanted to put those flowers in a vase while he slept, to allow the morning to fill the room, his wounds, us with sunlight.

I gently pressed my lips to his stitches, hoping that it was enough for us to heal.

And what would we be without writing, without being able to connect through corporeal touches, poetic imaginations, didactic manifestations? Surely a claustrophobic, dark, exsanguinated place; without words, there is no pulse, no beauty.

DEATH AND FUNERAL NOTICE

Connor Rodenbeck, a writer living in Denver, Colorado, died unexpectedly when he lost the ability to write. A numbness beginning in his shoulders and then spreading through his arms to his hands began on November 5th, 2020. Shortly thereafter, he couldn't hold a cup of earl gray tea (his favorite), let alone pick up a pen to write. On November 15th, wounds appeared all over his body, opening wide and red until they festered. On November 17th, he lost coherence and couldn't communicate with his partner, friends, or parents. On November 18th, he lost consciousness, laid in bed until his breathing slowed to a halt.

He is survived by his partner of two years, his close friends, his parents, and a cat. Furthermore, he is survived by his poems, by his journals, by his found notes, lists, and drawings. He is predeceased by a world often unappreciative and unknowing of poetry.

Connor was born in Aurora, CO on October 8th, 1999 to Bryan and Michelle Rodenbeck, both non-writers. He attended the University of Denver and garnered a degree in English (no surprise). He worked for literary journals like *Foothills* and the *Denver Quarterly*. His debut collection of poems was about family, paintings, memories, love, and burgeoning adulthood. His

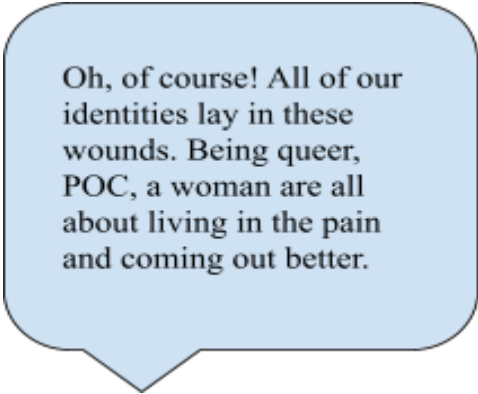
dying wish, told to his partner before the last breath, was to show the world the poems because they came from his heart and hands. He adored the poetic ability to make things beautiful.

The funeral will be a small event, but all who read this and his poems are invited to remember him as someone who bled imagination.

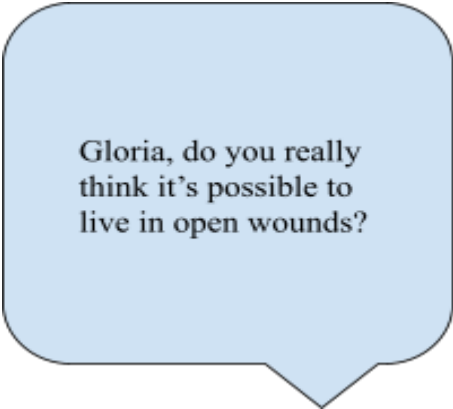
Burial: Cremated, ashes distributed in flower beds with the intention that the effervescent perennials will be pressed on the inside of pages. He lives on.

Once we realize the necessity of embracing and embodying our openings, they transform. Our wounded bodies, both tangible and intangible, give us the capability to make beautiful things.

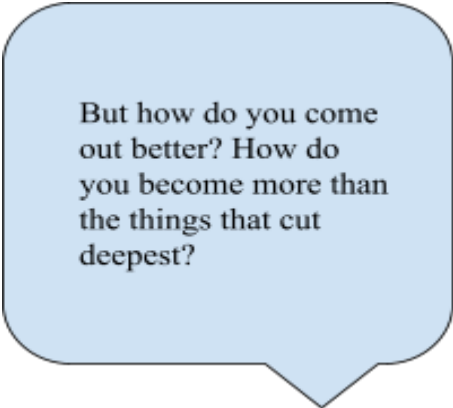
CONVERSATION W/ GLORIA ANZALDUA



Oh, of course! All of our identities lay in these wounds. Being queer, POC, a woman are all about living in the pain and coming out better.



Gloria, do you really think it's possible to live in open wounds?



But how do you come out better? How do you become more than the things that cut deepest?

It is certainly difficult.
Are you a writer? When I
write and create, I am
birthed from the words as
someone new and
glistening, transformed.

I am a writer! I am
scared that I won't
ever make it big,
though.

Don't think about that...
Writing is about building
bridges and growing
individual and collective
consciousness. If you can
do that, you are a
successful writer.

Thank you, Gloria. All
I want is to leave
behind something
beautiful...

Keep writing and you
will. We all will.

Effective and impactful writing uses the power of etherealization, to make our existence more visceral and beautiful than it was previously. Writing is the vessel for this etherealization (Rodenbeck, A Lovely Little Journal). The act of writing is driven by a goal to reveal inner thoughts, ideas, emotions, motivations; the act of folding oneself inside out and communicating internal vulnerability is tantamount to etherealization.

I am so fricken proud of myself, and I don't say that a lot. But it's true. I'm really kicking ass and I'm only 19. Like, wow. A full year of college w/ straight A's & 2 A-'s. That's pretty kick ass, and a lot to be proud of. Not to mention now involved I was w/ theatre from 1st Quarter. Like, I am that bitch. I am so fucking proud of me. And I know that I have good people in my life & that I am going to be so successful in whatever I pursue/finish. And so will my friends. Like, Lizzie will be one of the best directors, Connor will be a famous poet and prose author w/ weird/artsy folk reading him, Danyon will be performing super rad research (probs in Cali), and Trinity will be the best teacher/future Dec. of Ed. ever. And I will be whatever it is I am becoming.

Found journal entry from Maddie Heiken, a testament to the catharsis of putting words on a page. These manifestations are made concrete. Beauty isn't always about poetics, but about finding strength in creation.

Look back in the mirror and see yourself glistening. Our hands and minds and hearts can coalesce into words. Bring it back to the body: writing is a throat, a conduit for your inner voice to materialize. Together, we are able to become ethereal (Rodenbeck, A Lovely Little Journal)

ETHEREALIZE

It started out as little ponds:
they reflected in contained ways.
The grass at my feet

became algae as I inched closer.
I saw something more than a portrait of fowl feathers and mud.

My father was a chef at an Italian restaurant.
The artisan bread, hard-roofed with clouds on the inside,
was my favorite part because I could carve

the fluff out with my hands
like it meant something to ravage a beautiful thing.

I stuck my index finger in a pool of
cracked black pepper, olive oil, balsamic vinegar,
swirled it into an eye.

Those specks made a dappled thing.

I dip my finger into paper.

These words make a cruel thing.

Headlights streak the sky.
The geese migrate in these dark spaces,
slathering themselves on wet

oily placards of pond-film.

They hover with mossy clouds like
gossamer silhouettes,
uncontained.

Ponder pages of paper, what it means to configure language. Writing is a way to get your heart out of the container our bodies so often become. Now, become uncontained through the body's openings. Call what pours from yourself beauty, transcendence, love. Now, you're a writer.

References

Rodenbeck, Connor. *A Lovely Little Journal* , 2020.

“Tlilli, Tlapalli / The Path of the Red and Black Ink.” *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, by Anzaldúa Gloria, Aunt Lute Books, 1999, pp. 87–97.