

I Love This Body

Caroline Salzedo

Caroline Salzedo describes herself as a 'Shiatsu practitioner and teacher, writer, wanderer and crone'. Some of her stories are based on time spent in revolutionary Nicaragua during the 1980s.

'I Love this Body' is from A Sense of Place, a collection of work published in 2015 by Nottingham Writers' Studio to mark the group's arrival in new premises in Hockley, one of the city's old thoroughfares.

I love this body: the body that I know. It anchors me; takes me away from the chattering 'monkey mind'. When I breathe, the monkey quietsens. My lungs expand and massage the heart housed between them.

In Chinese Medicine, the heart is the Emperor and good health occurs when the Emperor is happy. How often has my Emperor been happy? I send her my focus as if I am holding a delicate, precious baby.

Is it her who sends these butterflies into my stomach? They release an aching that I cannot name, dark like a thicket of thorns. I ease my fingers underneath the ribs deep into the tissue. Gentle tears bubble up. Then with my slow, measured breathing, my stomach feels caressed; the tears stop; the butterflies still. Perhaps they have become dragonflies floating on the now-calm sea of my stomach.

The aching thicket is softening: it has been a lifetime's work to create; it is a lifetime's work to unravel.

From my stomach, liquid spurts through a valve into the small intestine. The pulsing rhythm of peristalsis is like a spiral, like the tides of the sea and movements of the universe. One of my Shiatsu teachers says it comes from your mother's egg at conception, at that alchemical moment when something new is created. I send my mind back to the spring when it happened. Perhaps birds sang like they do now.

The small intestine is deep in the body, not attached to the abdominal wall; a long thin tube with inner projections like sea anemones. Textbooks say the surface area is the size of a tennis court. It reverberates to change. In Chinese Medicine, it sorts the pure from the impure. As children, it's our

parents' role to do that, and protect us from shock. If they don't, as I know from all the small intestines I have massaged and tended like gardens, a deep need develops in the cells for safety and shelter. I breathe, for all the times when I felt lost and unsafe as a child. Now only I can make it better.

The whole sea of the digestive system is calmer. Peristalsis is like a stately minuet. I take my focus to the valve between the small and large intestines, down by the appendix, where it changes from a narrower tube to a wider one; from taking things in to letting them go: a pivotal place. I feel a whirring, like it is out of kilter, and I rub it, see it in my mind's eye opening easily, without spluttering.

Up the ascending colon, across and down the descending colon. The pillars of the large intestine whose strength holds us up are like one long tube on either side of our body. I imagine them filled with golden liquid, suffused with sunlight.

I breathe and take my hand round the right side to say hello to my liver; vital to life. What a name! The liver has a spark like the flash of inspiration. I feel it can take me anywhere in the universe: a magic carpet; my bottle with a genie and all the wishes in the world, if I but know how to ask.

And then the back; my spine and kidneys: my life story, told without pretence or bluster. We can put on a front. We cannot put on a back. Everything lies hidden here. The place between my shoulder blades where I erected walls behind my heart, and my back erupted with pain. Stories going right back to being alone in the darkness of the womb. In my mind's eye, I have held that delicate, precious baby, like I held my heart, and sent her love.

Breathe; remember that the stories are no more. They are in the past. I am sitting in a room in a familiar house. Outside, birds are singing. Reality is this body I love and know.

My hands take me to a place of healing where I acknowledge the fear and joy of everything known and unknown. My breath unfolds and ripples, and something opens like a trap door, connecting me out into the universe and down into my deepest cells.

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Nottingham Writers' Studio supports the development of creative writing in all its forms around the City. Currently, Nottingham seeks recognition by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco) as a City of Literature.