



The Writers Who Inspire Me

Clare Fisher

‘INSPIRE’ IS A GENTLE WORD; it makes me think of glossy life coaches and corporate team-building exercises. When I talk about writers that inspire me, however, I’m talking about something harsh, sudden, even violent; Roland Barthes talked about a photograph’s ‘punctum’ as the thing that punctures, that wounds — that makes you stop.

There was a time in my life when the writers who did this for me were the ones who gave me permission to be more me, both as a writer and a person. I was nineteen when I spotted Miranda July’s short-story collection, *No One Belongs Here More Than You*, in a bookshop; the title alone almost made me weep. The contents did not disappoint; reading her voicy, queer, first-person narrators was like opening a door to new parts of both my writing and my non-writing (living?) self. Now, over a decade later, I mostly flick through those pages when in a between-good-book void, and it’s less a matter of being wounded than of being reminded of wounds past — a bit like flicking through old family photos.

The writers that grab me these days are those who pull and push not only at the limits of language but at those of form. Lydia Davis takes the already chameleon short story and whittles it down to single paragraphs and sentences, sometimes stacking those sentences into long collages that seem to point towards somewhere completely else.

Then, there’s Anne Carson. I can’t believe I took so long to discover Anne Carson, and the way she slips over and under and through both form and



language, writing between essay, poetry, story and dramatic script, and never with any hint of showing off. *The Glass Essay* and *Decreation* are two books that give me a completely new reading experience every time.

I'm also, in these strange apocalypsy times, finding both comfort and excitement in Kafka and Beckett. They've been here and they've survived — just about. In fact, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* was the only fiction that did what Kafka said fiction ought to do and broke the frozen sea inside of me at the start of the pandemic.

Other authors who write from both within and beyond their assigned forms, across multiple forms, their prose constantly pointing towards the darkest and most joyful parts of life, are Maggie Nelson, Han Kang, Audre Lorde and Claudia Rankine.

I could go on. And on. And on. But I'd only be telling you about the words that wound whatever needs wounding inside of me right now. You'll need something completely different, and by the time you listen to these words, I bet I will, too. But when you read something and you put it down, you go outside, and there are thoughts in your head but you're not sure who they belong to, yours or the author's — that's when you know you've found the book that will help you become the person you need to be next.