

From Introspection to Activism: Elizabeth Acevedo's Performance and *The Poet X*
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In her TEDx performance titled "I use my poetry to confront the violence against women," available in the "Poetics" section of her website, Elizabeth Acevedo says that poetry must be carried in the body and that poetry must embody hope. Urging her audience to memorize a favorite poem, she ends her talk by performing Lucille Clifton's poem "Won't you celebrate with me," a poem about how one fashions a self with "no model": "born in in babylon / both nonwhite and woman / what did I see to be except myself?" (Clifton 427). Xiomara, the narrator of Acevedo's verse novel, *The Poet X*, through poetry and performance, fashions a self out of her self-consciousness about her body:

I let the words shape themselves hard on my tongue.
I let my hands pretend to be punctuation marks
That slash, and point, and press in on each other.
I let my body finally take up all the space it wants. (79)

While Xiomara's poems are mostly personal, autobiographical lyrics, by addressing the poems to her former middle-school students "and all the little sisters yearning to see themselves," Acevedo shows how young activists are made. In the penultimate poem called "Celebrate with Me," the Poet X vows to step forward. This title, of course, alludes to Clifton's poem which ends with her speaker celebrating "that everyday / something has tried to kill me / and has failed" (427). Acevedo's imagined adolescent slam-poet protagonist serves as a model that can help young poets survive "babylon" by making their introspection public.

Acevedo, Elizabeth *The Poet X*. HarperTeen, 2018.

---. "Poetics." <http://www.acevedowrites.com/poetics> Retrieved 11 October 2018.

Clifton, Lucille. *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton: 1965-2010*. Edited by Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser. Foreword by Toni Morrison. Boa Editions, 2012.

<http://magazine.gwu.edu/liz-acevedo-verses-the-novel>