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Self-Assessment #3

My ability to read and write poetry has greatly improved since the beginning of the semester. I’ve always been a silent reader, but I’ve learned that poetry isn’t just something you read quietly to yourself. It is meant to be shared. Which leads me to the second best thing I’ve learned: my poetry isn’t just for me. When I used to write poetry, it was a way of self-expression but I never really let anyone see that expression. It was more of a vent or a rant than a poem. Now I write with my audience in mind and for myself. I see it as a form of communication, like reaching out to someone else with my soul. I may never hear what they have to say back, but I know that they hear me.

That being said, I’ve definitely been reading more poetry. Now that I have a more intimate view of poems, it touches me so much more than it ever could before. In the twenty-four years of my life, I’ve never once purchased a book of poetry. Just in the past couple months, I’ve bought two. When I write poetry now, sometimes I’m still inspired by a poem I just read so it’s almost like I’m responding to the writer or continuing a dialogue that’s been ongoing if I’ve been reading their work for a while.

Reading poetry absolutely makes me a stronger writer, I think. Every time I see some unique trick the writer did on the page, whether with white space or form, I hear my teacher’s voice in my head: “Steal it!” My poetry craft has certainly improved (at least to me it has), but I’ve noticed a change in my fiction style as well. One of my goals for taking this class was to become a more concise writer, to pack in those sticky details that I knew I lacked. So as I went through the course, I tried to pack as much imagery as I could into the lines to communicate my idea and my visuals. As a result, when I write prose now, many times I could hack away at some of the lines and punctuation and get a poem out of it!

One of the most challenging aspects was writing for workshops, especially in the beginning of the semester. It was nauseating for me to know that not only would my peers (whom at the time were complete strangers) would read my work and pick it apart, but that they would have two and a half days to do it. Needless to say, cranking out that week’s poem was much more difficult. But it became easier as time went on and I was able to get to know my peers through their poems. Even though there are still a couple people I’ve never actually spoken to, I feel connected in some way because of their poems and their feedback on my work.

Because of the workshops, I was able to fine tune my revision process. Many times, I would revise as I wrote the poem, scratching out the lines I liked but didn’t quite fit. I would lose a lot of great lines that way. Now, I read my old poems, write out what I really wanted that poem to say in prose and then take the best lines from both. From those pieces, I start putting them together like a puzzle, adding a few extra lines when necessary. Most of the time, I’m structuring as I go along into whatever form I’m experimenting with, though most of my writing admittedly ends up as free verse. I’ve also stopped rhyming as an absolute necessity. Before, I would force the rhyme so that my end result was bland and generic, suitable for a Hallmark card, but not a poetry anthology. Now I just let rhythm happen on its own. Sometimes it comes through as an eye rhyme, sometimes a true rhyme. Sometimes there’s no rhyme at all, but the rhythm comes through the reading.

I will, without a doubt, continue writing poetry after this course is over. My goal of being a published writer has a whole new branch I could explore, once I’ve improved some more, of course. I’ve also started a children’s poetry strand that I’d like to turn into children’s books one day. I find myself jotting down verses all throughout the day, on whatever scrap paper I can get my hands on. I don’t think I really knew what poetry was, what it really and truly was, before this semester. It always seemed stuffy and trite, cliché and only about ridiculous abstractions. But I know now that it’s way more than that, though unfortunately that other stuff does exist. I never imagined that I could write poems about a toy turtle falling in love with a bottle of hand sanitizer. Nothing is off limits anymore and that’s the way I love to write.