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Self-Assessment #2

At the beginning of the semester, I was hopeful that my poetry skills would improve and that I would have a better understanding of form and technique. I don’t think I could have imagined how much I’ve grown. I’m proud of the work I produce and I enjoy the challenge each new form presents, though admittedly some are much harder than others. My ability to read and understand poetry has definitely improved since workshop allows some of my questions to be answered by the poet themselves, and the interpretations of classmates has made me become more open-minded to the meanings of the poems. I find that the topics I enjoy the most are about the ordinary, every-day happenings of life and their elevation in poetry. Because poetry has the reputation of being flowery and romantic and (for lack of a better word) a bit frou-frou, it’s so refreshing to read poetry about dogs chewing on notebooks and admiring the crazy cat lady next door. I don’t know that I am drawn to any particular form, but I do like poems with clear rhythms. The musicality of a poem is possibly one of my favorite discoveries of this semester.

I do believe that my writing skills have improved on every front. Writing original poems has become much easier now that a whole new world of subject matter has opened up, and my academic writing has become less wordy and more to the point. I’ve noticed that I don’t write from my emotions as much as I did when I was younger, which I have no doubt is part of the reason I’ve improved, but I’ve learned to control the emotion I use to write. I’m still very passionate about my subjects, but I don’t drown each line with overly clichéd drama. Because I’m not so melodramatic in my writing anymore, I’ve noticed that my topics come to me on a whim rather than something that I’ve been brooding over for weeks. For example, with my definition poem, I was struggling to find a word I really liked but I was also studying for a Formal Logic midterm, writing a Shakespeare term paper (worth 20% of my final grade, mind you), and trying to keep up with all my reading. Needless to say, I was pretty stressed out, so of course my eating habits began to include more fast food and chocolate and my thoughts were more dark than usual. I found myself fighting off all those depressing things and so when I found the word sciamachy, I knew I couldn’t have found a more perfect topic. Of all the poems I’ve written this semester, that one probably packed the most emotion, but because it was a definition poem, I was able to step back from it and force the emotion into the context of a dictionary. It was a beautifully therapeutic assignment for me.

I don’t think I’ve ever enjoyed revisions of anything, but with poems, I love the challenge it presents. I look at the comments on each poem as a way to take something good and make it outstanding. As I said before, I’m very proud of the poems I’ve been able to write, but I know that everything can be improved. It is certainly a challenge to conform to the forms (the sonnet was the bane of my existence for about a week) but it’s a challenge that I know I needed in order to write better. I still would like to conquer the more strict forms like the sonnet and the sestina, and I know that my imagery in poems can definitely continue to improve. I can’t believe how much I’ve improved in such a short period of time, so I can’t even imagine where I’ll be at the end of the semester.