

Statement of Poetics
Fall Semester 2012

What I did the best with in this workshop was being able to listen to the honest feedback that I got on poetry, and instead of hiding in a corner as a result, using that to the best of my ability to really try and improve my workshop poems. Being an upcoming creative writing major, it is my goal to get as much as I possibly can from the creative writing program, because I feel now after all the different types of English classes in high school, some literature and some workshop, that I just need the training offered from practicing writers in the workshop courses at Redlands. I am satisfied that I met this goal in my first workshop at Redlands. Sure I could have gained other lessons too, but in the time I had, and the lessons I did take, I think really trying to apply my feedback into my work went well this semester.

While I am happy with how I applied myself in my written work, I know that my participation work needs improvement. I feel I was particularly quiet both at the beginning of the semester, when I was further outside my comfort zone, and at the end, when I felt really run down by the multiple papers assigned simultaneously in several classes. (Though I understand these are not excuses for not speaking in class). I think there are two parts to the discussions (namely, two types of discussion): discussing the workshop poems, and discussing the published poems.

I observed a difference in my discussion participation between the two. For some reason, I felt it was easier for me to participate in discussing the workshop poems than the published poems. Especially by the end of the semester I did particularly try to offer insights to the other students on their poems. I guess I felt I owed them that given I was receiving feedback on my poems. As for the published poems, I sometimes felt it was more difficult to

form a complete thought in my head in the time-frame of the discussion. Whenever a published piece really resonated with me, I did definitely try to give input at least once if not two or three times.

In the end, as disappointed as I sometimes was in myself for not participating more in group discussions, especially when talking about published poems, I'm glad that this class offered me an honest starting point for me as a student in the Creative Writing department, and a way for me to measure my progress as a creative writing student.

In reflection on the discussion part of the course, I came to realize that I usually spoke when I felt I had something significant to put into the discussion, and not just reiterating a point that has been repeated a dozen times before. As admirable as it may initially sound that I don't want to waste discussion time by repeating a specific point, I understand that this reasoning is flawed, because I may include a tiny part of that point which someone else has not brought up, which may invariably change the course of the discussion.

I think that this reasoning stems from my wish to take the workshop so seriously. Whereas I felt really good about how I tried to apply the feedback to my poems, and I felt like I was pretty quiet in discussions because of a desire of being efficient with time, I know that I took the other students' work just as seriously as I took mine. This really became evident to me when we broke into small groups to discuss the non-dominant hand poem exercises, and without the guide of a teacher or assisting student, was able to put forth coherent thoughts for the writer in question and try to give them genuine feedback that would mean something to them.

As I drafted each one of my poems for the workshop, and I drafted each one again for the final portfolio, I grew increasingly aware of how I was changing the poems and becoming

fully conscious of my word choice, sometimes changing one word in a sentence just because of the slightly different connotation it brought with it. I noticed that the drafts that accompanied the poems for the final portfolio had more raw emotions in them and specific images as I refined my word choice.

This leads me to observing my own progress in my revision process. In the beginning, when I was confronted with a poem that I had not received workshop feedback on, I was very unsure of how to proceed. By this point, I have enough trust in myself that after I've let a poem sit for a while, I'll return to read it, and be able to pick up images that I want to play around with and words that I want to switch out.

Also in considering my personal progress, I remember the class where we talked about plateauing in our comfort zone and how it was time to push forward again. I thought that was quite a remarkable observation (not that it happens, but that I was in that situation) because I know I was way out of my comfort zone when I first started the class. I had only experienced high school English class units covering poetry that force everyone to recite one of their own poems by memory, and then just nine weeks after going through this course, to be totally at ease with knowing the next writing assignment will be presented to the class was quite remarkable.

I am not sure how much my writing itself changed, as opposed to the awareness of my own writing. I have become aware of those "rough edges" that I would take out in future drafts, and that perhaps I should not take them out, at least not right away. This is all a result of the workshop approach. I made a similar observation last year, after a semester of a non-fiction workshop and that class also made the most noticeable impact and improvement of

my writing out of any of my high school English classes. The noticeable progress in my awareness of the craft in poetry writing could be said for this workshop as well.