

Poetry Workshop III

Final Portfolio
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Section I ~ Statement of Poetics

I was nervous coming into my first 300 level workshop for the Creative Writing major, especially since I am not planning on concentrating in poetry. I didn't know quite what to expect or if I was going to have adequate time to commit to the necessary time. As it turns out, this semester (as usual) has proven to be surprising and fulfilling. Poetry at the University of Redlands has proven to be far more enriching than I had expected, coming in from high school. This is something that has been true since taking Poetry I my very first semester as a student. As a result, I personally feel like I have invested quite a bit of time and investment into my personal work. As I said in the Mid-term Portfolio, it has been gratifying to see my growth as a workshop member, and to mark the progress I have made from my first semester here. I have not been perfect, most often lacking the detailed reading of assignments given, but whenever this has been pointed out, or self-acknowledged, it has driven me to go back and re-read or rework the assignment, knowing that it wouldn't likely show in the workshop anyway. All-in-all, I am proud of the effort I have put into this workshop, and I think the work (the willingness to try out suggestions for the sake of exercises) shows for it.

When I think about my work, I am surprised at what came out this semester. If someone had told me that the collection of poems that I have now would be what I had at the end of Poetry III, I would have looked at them with a strange look and have said "really?" But then I think where the poems came from: more often than not, situations that arose in this specific Spring semester, whether family related or campus involvement, and it makes sense. Certainly, each poem seems more personally meaningful to me than my poems from Poetry Workshop I were. I suppose this could be something to be wary of, but I am proud of my ability to not hold anything personally, and to be willing to revise based on feedback from fellow students or you. I think that the two poems I have chosen to showcase in this portfolio are proof of that willingness.

I will not discuss the process of the revisions in close detail, saving that discussion for the revision statement for *The Most Beautiful Place*, but rather, I would like to address in what ways my work has changed more broadly. In this semester, I became very aware of my affinity for nature scenes/descriptions. My work started to change after the first two weeks, after we discussed pronouns, and the various ways they can shape and influence poetry. My process was revised a little as I tried to incorporate more pronouns into the work. At first this led to very demarcated sections of nature scenes and anonymous “you’s” and “I’s”. Slowly, and with the revisions of the poems, the lines became more blurred. I still aim to work more on concrete characters in the poems that work more in tandem with the nature scenes, but revising the poetic exercises has shown me how that work starts. By the end, the third/fourth drafts of *A Darker Shade*, the specific drafts I am most proud of this semester (while acknowledging it is only the *third/fourth* draft) became the representation of the direction I would like my poetry to go more towards.

Finally, I would like to address the collections of poetry we read this semester. While in Poetry II I did learn about various types of poems (e.g. poems of address as opposed to persona poems and so on) this semester has been particularly great for learning about just how different poems can be, from narrative to lyric, from topical to nonsensical. The difference between Connie Voisine and Chad Sweeney’s styles (that we read in class) is astronomical, and it has been really great for me to see that both of these forms of poetry are published, and the writers as respected poets. As for the reading, there have been times, yes, where I was unable to give the poetry as close a reading as I would have liked, but as I mentioned, I went back and reread those works more closely. Also, there are moments I am particularly proud of, such as the time I came prepared to lead the discussion. I was unsure how in the world it was going to work, but I

appreciated the result for the effort put in. Just like in my semester abroad in the Czech Republic, where we got to meet a different writer every week (some novelists, some poets), perhaps the most extrinsically rewarding component to this course was getting to meet the writers and having time for an intimate Q&A with them. The benefit to this is hearing the sometimes surprising simplicity to their answers, and then opening a complex can of worms with questions you don't expect to, and also getting to hear where poets will completely contradict each other (perhaps the most beneficial part of all of these meetings for undergraduate students).

Section II ~ A Darker Shade

A Darker Shade – *Original Draft*

Fog wraps around the trees.
The setting sun catches
in the evening air.
Purple sinks to blue as
black's despair oozes across the sky.

The stars peek out from behind
the black-iron curtain,
each one a single glimpse
of hope burning 10 million
light years away.

Words whisper in the wind.
An ancient promise glows
brightly,
stuck in the stone ribs of the Earth.

I turned towards you,
tears in your eyes as the dusk
settled over the crumbling dais, trapped
between two fallen pillars:
the last reminder of an immortal
memory.

A Darker Shade – 2nd Draft

Deep within the Redwood forest,
where fog wraps around
the trees, I hear there is a flower
that grows. Its petals midnight-black,
dripping with viscous oil that
seeps into the Earth, a burning,
toxic ooze.

Look, the stars peek out
from behind their velvet
veil. You stare into the heavens,
a sea of lights reflected in your
eyes, as you soak in the time...
millions of years past.

As we stand there, the sky clouds
over, the hope of starlight
gone.
Words whisper in the wind
as you turn towards me. An ancient
promise glows brightly
in the stone ribs of the Earth.

In the midnight of a moonless night,
in the darkest crevice of a cracked
and fallen pillar,
that black flower blooms, feeding on
the despair suffused
in the forgotten
life of an immortal
memory.

A Darker Shade – 3rd Draft

There is a flower that grows, deep
within the Redwood forest,
where the fog
wraps
around the trees. It blooms only

in the midnight of a moonless
night,
under the darkest crevice of a cracked
and fallen pillar.

The clouds drift over,
rolling, ominous, thickening darkness
matched by the petals
midnight-black, dripping
with viscous oil that seeps
into the Earth, a burning,
toxic ooze.

The sky starts to rain, but it is
not a kind rain, nor
gentle.
It is acidic, searing the land-
scape with its silky
poison.

As the winds pick up, and
batter and beat
the flower, the flower
basks in its hellish glory,
soaking up
pain and misery
through the roots, clamped
into the rock itself until
the rock
withers into a pile
of pebbles.

The winds die –
suddenly. Stars peek
out from behind their velvet
veil. Words whisper in
the wind, an ancient
promise glows brightly

in the stone ribs of the Earth.

As dawn breaks over the cloudline,
the world is

quiet.

In the morning air, the flower
blooms, sparkling intensely
obsidian black,
reflecting the depth of
the soul.

Dewdrops cling to the underside
of each petal,
a darker shade,
quivering and delicate,
surviving,
like wind chimes drifting
across a meadow in
the afternoon sun.

A Darker Shade – 4th Draft

There is a flower that grows, deep
within the Redwood forest,
where the fog
wraps
around the trees. It blooms
in night, under the crevice
of a cracked pillar.

Clouds drift over, matched
by the petals, midnight-black,
oil seeping into the Earth.

The sky rains, but it is not a kind rain.
It is acidic.

The winds pick-up, the flower
basks in its hellish glory, clamped
into the rock itself until
the rock withers
into pebbles.

The winds die.
Stars peek out from their veil.
Words whisper, an ancient promise
glows in the stone ribs of the Earth.
As dawn breaks, the world is

quiet.

In the morning air, the flower gleams,
petals spread wide, reflecting
the depth of the soul.
Dewdrops cling
to the underside of each petal,
a darker shade.

The flower thrives in pain, where no others
can live. It feeds on despair. It is an
abhorrent beauty transfigured in hell.

**This draft was playing with taking out as
many adjectives/strings as possible of
modifiers to see what the effect would be.*

Section III ~ The Most Beautiful Place

The Most Beautiful Place – *Original Draft*

The sun peeks over the horizon,
its hair a hazy mess.
A chickadee tremolos in the morning
air, as dewdrops slide down
the foggy window panes.
The trees bask in the golden glow
flowing with the intensity
of fire.
The morning mist burns away, to reveal
the most beautiful autumn day
you have ever seen.

I asked you what the most beautiful place
on Earth would look like. Do you remember?
This is what you told me. And I asked you,
why you didn't mention people? Why
not include your best friend, or perhaps
your lover? Because that seems so lonely.
To which you replied, beauty is loneliness, and
to be the most beautiful, therefore, necessitates
being the loneliest.

The Most Beautiful Place – 2nd Draft

The sun peeks
over
the horizon,
its hair a hazy mess.

I asked you
what the most beautiful
place
would look like as
on Earth
a chickadee tremolos
in the morning
air.

I asked you,
as dewdrops slip
down the foggy window panes,
why you didn't mention people?
Not your best friend
Nor your lover.

The trees bask in the golden glow,
flowing
with the intensity
of fire.

Because that seems so
lonely.

You replied
Beauty is
loneliness.

To be the most beautiful
necessitates being the loneliest.

The morning mist
burns
away, to reveal
the most beautiful autumn day
you have ever seen.

The Most Beautiful Place – 3rd Draft

*The sun peeks over
the horizon, its hair
a hazy mess.*

I asked you
what the most beautiful
place on Earth
would look like.

*The tree decays
in the morning
air.*

*Parrots, brimming
with color glide across
the field, glittering from
the sun-dried husk of
bleached-white bones.*

*Dewdrops soar
out of the basin of a
silent waterfall.*

*The trees bask
in the golden glow,
flowing
with the intensity of fire.*

I asked you,
why you didn't mention people?
Not your best friend
Nor your lover. Because that seems so
lonely.

You replied
*Beauty is
loneliness.
To be the most beautiful
necessitates being the loneliest.*

The morning mist
burns

away, to reveal
the most beautiful autumn day
you have ever seen.

The Most Beautiful Place – 4th Draft

The most beautiful place is silent.
The mountains stand mute.
The grass condenses the evening chill,
 on its fingers, reaching towards the heavens.
The wind whistles between rocks,
 without a sound.
The crickets hold their breath.
The lake ripples, stirring the star-glazed sky.
The Northern Lights glimmer and dance,
 casting long shadows
 onto the horizon.
The most beautiful place is silent.
There are no people here.

Revision Statement for *The Most Beautiful Place*

The original idea I had in my head was that people these days (celebrities especially) try to maintain their “beauty” – their youth – and that strikes me as being a particularly lonely path to walk down. My original vision for the poem was a description of beautiful scenery, which is then revealed as the answer to the question: what is the most beautiful place. The answer specifically excluded people. This created an unclear two-block-stanza effect however.

For the 2nd draft, I used this poem to play with movement across the page, experimenting with Connie Voisine’s style. I also broke up the two paragraph-stanzas into a dialogue-style. I did not really change the wording or description (except for small words) because I specifically wanted feedback from the workshop how the paragraphs being broken up worked for the poem.

In the third draft, I felt that the poem worked much better in stanzas lined up on the left margin. I also tried to respond specifically to the feedback, that the images, while beautiful, did not evoke loneliness. I think the third draft also fails in this, except *perhaps* for the image of the abandoned skeletons. At the same time, I italicized the dialogue to try to make the conversation more clear, and while that succeeded, it highlighted the lack of purpose of the conversation.

With the 4th draft, I took a radically different approach. Its form is much simpler, consisting of one stanza filled with subject-verb combinations. This draft was inspired by a painting at the Johnston Art Exhibition. It was a painting of dark mountains, a lake and the Northern Lights. It is one of the rare times I have been captivated by visual art, and it occurred to me here was an unnamed, fictional landscape that seemed exceedingly beautiful to me, in other words, a specific place instead of vague descriptions. I decided to try to describe it for this draft, but keep the reference to no people as a twist at the end, because I still wanted to describe beauty as without people.