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Creative Writing: Poetry

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Poetry Portfolio

Poem #1: First Draft:

Prompt 2 –

Regret pounds on my door,
And it's no longer a love story
But a love song,
Because the cardinal outside
Reminds me of his golden voice,
And the hum of my old radio,
Just like how he hummed
Deeply,
The memory of sound
Reverberating through my bones -
His song, the first one
I wanted engrained within my soul.

And the wandering raindrops
Reflect my sorrow,
Like dissonant tears
With a rhythm so painful,
And the fragile tendrils
Of my mournful heart -
Quietly shattered,
And now steadily
Torn apart,
Are lost -
They fall down into the abyss,
Filled with longing and heartbreak,
My heartbeat, amiss.

With him, I felt
Belonging,
Like the warmth of
Newfound purity,
Our smiling words that promised forever,
An oasis of comfort,
In a desert of insecurity.

But now, I'm barren again,
And I hate how we proved them right -
"The first ones never last"

Oh, how I wish I could
Undo that night.

Revised Draft:

The Radio

In the season of the blooming raindrop,
When the daffodils laughed with the honey and rye,
The young lady sat in her lover's garden
And sent up sweet wishes, up into the sky

With an antenna so tall and bright,
It held her dreams and carried his voice
And the sound hummed and thrummed
And she swayed and wailed

While the pitying cardinal whistled beside her
On the branch where they last laid their heads,
He had whispered "forever"
And she had planted her final kiss.

The radio was deep and its melody low,
For this was his music she was listening to,
And he wasn't even singing yet it warmed her like a lullaby
So the dying sun beheld her, and even it, it cried.

But then the radio's battery died and
Its grave rose with his,
And the cardinal now chirped a funeral song,
And the garden was only watered with tears.

Poem #2: First Draft:

Ten Tankas from an Urban Tanka Walk

In the underground path,
with flames of pink graffiti,
Someone has abandoned their brown clothes
And now they collect leaves and footprints.

Live music thrums,
Bones shake with rhythm
of the bassist's guitar,
drumming beats seep into the ground,
tiles trembling,
heart palpitating.

Little kids play
at the fountain where the half moon
frowns down from above,
the sculpture's dark metal,
and she's the only black girl there.

"Weird meat"
His t-shirt shouts.
His flip-flops lead him to the butchery
And the empty restaurant down the street
is vegetarian...

There's a couple on a date:
A mouse darts beneath the cracked bench,
and I wonder if that's the only reason
she clutches her purse.

Tendrils of vines -
Man-made - climb up the stone pillars
and form a proud ring of
Fake greenery around me.
But there,
There are the trees.

A murmuring bee
follows her purple polka-dotted tee,
circling her pen that makes
waves of wandering ink
across the page.

One airplane,
Two, three, four more -
A boy's hopeful leap from his skateboard,

His fingers graze the sky,
Still, the mother does not bat an eye.

The rich scent of roast meat
wafts to where the old couple sits,
beneath the fairy-light trees,
quiet and at peace.
See now, how life flees.

Dangling veiny leaves bow their
Green heads
To the brick church, its stained glass showing
no reflection
of the law office across the road.

Revised Draft:

♀

A fist struck out of the earth last night
And took me by my heel
And like Lorde and Crenshaw and hooks,
She rose out of piercing chains
And murky pages,
Murmured her words to me and
Bathed me in my misery,
Gently rocked me in my pain,
And we whispered about the man
On that bench, on that street
In those clothes with that
Rat
That damn rat
Who flickered beneath the bench just like my
Smile
That wavered in the lamplight
And my
Heart
Who sank back into its homeland
And it feels like the only antidote to
Loneliness is

Violence

And it feels like
After all,
I'm still a woman

And it's still a curse.

Poem #3: First Draft:

Love Story of Leaves

With the remainder of dust in her hair
And speckles of twilight on her shoulders,
She dances with the wind,
The breeze twirling her like a ghost.

In the morning, the shimmering moonlight
Turns golden to join the eager sun rays
As her fingers glisten,
Arms stretched out to catch the day's smile.

That dividing river that runs between -
Its waves who gush and flow with ill intent
Don't stop my distant love;
I ne'er knew beauty before her.

And the rift separating us is the same from which our soils dine,
And still, I keep hope that one day our branches intertwine.

Revised Draft:

*My bones are weary
I am coated in the soils of heartbreak,
And I hold her till I can't no more,
The termites are stronger than me.*

*I dance out of my grave
Do you see me among the mist?
Do you see how the wind twirls me
And she does not?
And the breeze's cold touch soothes my cheek,
And the leaves watch, with a careful twist of their shape
And the gush of the river taunts me with his
Elegant flow
And I live in the haunting moonlight
For the golden sun always was too bright -
Too much brighter*

*.
I was never quite as beautiful*

Poem #4: First Draft:

Prompt 10 -

Funny how the things we lose
Are often the things that stay with us
the longest.
Funny how I kept searching,
in vain,
for that paradise.
The pain,
I was escaping
So sunless for that age.
I was a child -
Too young to be thinking that hard,
Too young to be feeling that scarred.

But behind the dainty pages of
that innocent coloring book
an illustration
that to me, said
heaven,
was a constellation
of everything I wanted to call
Home.

I could feel the grass and
smell the flowers,
swing on the bench
and Imagine for hours.
There was glitter in the air when I stared at that page,
and sunshine in my heart each time it graced my
Longing gaze.

Revised Draft:

I ask my Mind why she's left me again
M umbling to my blood and wishing farewell to my bones
A s she escapes the dank body she calls a cold trap
G rowing away to where the bright Unknown beams surer
I shout out, "When will I see you again?"
N either a nod nor a glance does she give in return
A nd I'm tired of abandonment, but she's happy when she's there
T wirling in another world, where there's joy, not despair
I watch her, almost enviously, the way the light makes her spin
O n the daydream that carries her, no worry of anger or sin,
N ot chained by the world that stifles her Hope, now her delight and relief-
I can only Imagine.

Poem #5: First Draft:

Elegy for Sound

The bells gradually play softer then grow louder

hear them

Won't you climb up and play, too?

staccato

that took my Joy and my song.

hear me

(Explanation:) This poem was made fully from the pages of a piano sheet music book. I love piano, so it immediately caught my eye and I wanted to make something creative out of it. This poem is from the perspective of someone who is in an unhappy/unhealthy marriage, and she mourns her song, her sound (and through these, her happiness) which have been taken away by the marriage and the person she married. The “bells” are wedding bells, which are usually joyous, inviting and have a celebratory connotation, but they, by signifying her marriage to this person, have stolen her joy and her music, by hiding the bad parts of her relationship with a deceitful layer of their own music. (I hope this makes sense). I incorporated symbols and musical instructions from the book into the poem to make it more intertwined with the materials and with the concept of music. The symbol “*mf*” instructs the piano-player’s volume in that section (*mf* translates to moderately loud), but I used it as a curse word to label her husband in this piece (and possibly, also indicating the increased volume with which the speaker says this word). I also used the instruction “*staccato*” above the last parts of the poem to introduce the (visibly) detached, broken up nature of the last part (this instruction usually indicates that the player should play the notes sharply and detached from each other). Finally, at the end of the second line and last line, I used a symbol that indicates a pause in piano-playing to signify a pause in reading the poem, and the finality of the ending.

Revised Draft:

Ode to Sound

It's like my eyes had been as foggy as the
Misty windows of a deceitful church, with bells
Harshly clinking, but gradually,
Your tentative fingers would play
Across the strings of my heart, softer
Than dahlia petals who fall, then
Land in the humming earth from which they grow.

It's like your soft care made my heart louder,
With your sweet whispers that I always hear -
Even in roaring dreams I feel them.
There was only death before, now I won't
Ever stop living, not as long as I have you
in my arms, in my home, where the sunrays now climb
To join and sing and smile and ring and crawl up

My wavering darkness, and
Up to where the angels play.

Can you hear them too?
Maybe not, after all it's my heaven that
I watch in the clearing sky, when the *mf*
That silenced me and took
My ring, my tears, my smile, my
Joy
Doesn't reach me anymore and

I no longer feel strangled, my
Love found its voice, and I found my song.

You who brought it back, I hope you hear
The happiness it sings of, the happiness within me.

Craft Letter

My set of ten poems presented above contains five first drafts of poems, and five revised versions of those same pieces. This revision process was a challenging one for me, as before, I didn't often work with my writing the way I did here. It required opening my mind up to think outside the stifling walls we often find ourselves hiding behind as creatives. These revisions are not just a quick change here or there to one word or the other, which is what I was used to doing – these revisions involved me revisiting the poems with new ideas and new skills to try to apply to them.

The first poem presented was in response to the course's Prompt 2, in which we took another classmate's secret and transformed it into a poem. The secret I had was about someone who is still in love with their first love, and regrets losing them. I used the theme of song and music to depict this in the first draft, and the line *And the hum of my old radio, / Just like how he hummed / Deeply*, is what inspired my revised draft. I liked the idea of a radio as a way to recall and feel the love you hold towards someone, and I also wanted to attempt a narrative poem. So, I wrote "The Radio" about a woman who had lost her lover (seemingly through death), and now held onto him by listening to his voice on the radio, which is the only thing still keeping her hanging on. However, the radio's battery dies and this causes the reality of his permanent absence to dawn on her and affect her forever. I maintained the inclusion of the cardinal as a character in the revised draft, to connect it more with the first draft and also to enhance my use of nature in the piece (as described, the story takes place during the season of spring). I enjoyed trying to convey a story through poetry and incorporating the themes of nature and love which are so significant and present throughout a lot of my work.

The second poem in the portfolio was a series of ten urban tankas as the first draft, and the revised draft took one specific tanka and expanded it. *She clutches her purse* is the more exact line that inspired the revision, and I also drew inspiration from the WGSS class I took this semester, something that was very impactful on me. Intertwining these different parts of my life with my creativity was a valuable part of the process. The piece tries to convey anger and loss of hope, and this intense emotion was not really there in the first draft. Because of this, I enjoyed expanding the intriguing observations of the tanka into something more specific and something you wouldn't know the woman in the scene was experiencing/feeling/thinking just by looking at her. I also liked my use of "rat" in the revised draft as opposed to "mouse" in the first draft, with the intentional connotations contributing to the shift in emotion.

The next first draft I presented is a personal twist on a sonnet and involves themes of distant love, nature, separation. For the revision of this, I took inspiration from the line *The breeze twirling her like a ghost* and decided to expand on the story of and imagery of "ghost". It was also partly inspired by a classmate's comments about it, in which they interpreted death as a significant aspect in the piece. This wasn't my intention in the first draft but I decided to explore that in the revised one. The subject is in love with someone else who they no longer can reach (and both of them may be dead), and the subject describes how they interact with and move with nature, but not with the person they'd prefer to be doing this with. They then also compare themselves to nature and how they never could have matched the beauties in the natural world around them. I enjoyed my use of imagery to do with nature in this piece, and the parallels between both poems – the breeze, the river, the "golden" sunlight, and so on.

The fourth poem's first draft was in response to Prompt 10, in which I talked about a book I had as a child, where the image on the last page completely enveloped me in feeling of joy, serenity, peace, desire, and longing to be in the beautiful world it depicted. I really didn't like this poem, though, but as I revisited it later, the capitalized word "Imagine" caught my eye. This is what led me to create the revised version where each first letter of each line spells out the word "Imagination". The subject complains about how their Mind (personified) is always leaving them, leaving the body behind to go temporarily find a fantasy world of light and happiness, where she can thrive and "imagine" in ways she can't otherwise. This speaks to my own life and experiences, where daydreaming and thinking are methods of escaping our harsh, cold world.

Finally, the last poem is a visual collage as its first draft, where I placed segments of piano sheet music together and spoke about the feeling of being silenced by an unhealthy relationship. The revised version is actually a golden shovel of this original one, with each final word of each line stringing together vertically to form the entire poem of the first draft. The collage was already a form of poetry that I had not experimented with before, and after doing that, I was inspired to try other new forms – in this case, the golden shovel, done with one of my own pieces. Sometimes I like to leave things up for interpretation and sometimes I don't, but the subjects of these poems could be said to be the same, with the revised draft depicting them after they had escaped the unhealthy relationship, found a new, good love with someone else (whom they are addressing in the revised draft), and gotten their "song" back - hence the shift in the titles. This revision gave me a challenge, one that I enjoyed exploring, while allowing me to keep and expand on the same themes and characters.

This semester, my interaction with writing and the things that led me to create a poem varied. In class, the course's prompts encouraged me to explore forms and aspects of poetry

that I hadn't before, and the opportunity for this exploration encouraged my writing process. Outside of class, my writing usually emerged when I was intensely experiencing emotions or felt inspired by the world around me. I loved observing, feeling, and the art of noticing my surroundings, including people and nature. It is quite apparent in my work that I am heavily inspired by the natural world – I find it so beautiful, and using personification and imagery to enhance my depiction of it are some of my favorite techniques to use in poetry. Finding the connections between nature and humanity, and love and nature is so meaningful to me, as well as appreciating the amazing, detailed beauty within nature itself. I also drew a lot of inspiration for my poetry from my feelings towards my partner. Our relationship and my immense love for her have been a huge influence on my poems, especially those centered around being in love.

This semester, I usually wrote in a focused, immersed state when I was inspired and then would come back to my poem afterwards, revisit it and continue to explore those ideas. Other times, I would leave it alone and perhaps re-read it a while later. Music, silence, background sounds were all parts of my writing process at different times, and I also often felt the need to write after reading something that I found profound or thought-provoking. Often random pieces in my Notes app on my phone were where my creative process took place, whereas other times I enjoyed intentionally living the experience of pen-and-paper writing. Through these elements of my process, I was able to explore my role as the poet, incorporate themes and elements that were important or interesting to me, and expand my creative borders to include newer ideas that I was exposed to. Playing with different perspectives or personas, and experimenting with rhyme and imagery were a few ways in which my creativity was challenged and utilized this semester.

This poetry course enhanced this process and encouraged me to think deeply and more intentionally about the way I write. I realized how significant it is to give myself enough time to sit with my ideas and my words, listen and read, create and revise. In the past, I hadn't been as strongly prompted to write poetry as I was this semester, and this made me think about myself and my process and how I need to be attentive to it in order to improve it in order for it to have a positive impact on my writing. This intention was something that I hadn't given as much thought to as I did in this class. Revision was also something that had been difficult for me, as I often avoided revisiting my old poetry, afraid of facing my writing flaws. When I did revise, it was a word/line change here or there, a punctuation adjustment. In this class, instead, my mind was opened to the vast possibilities of revising, or re-imagining, that one can do with a poem. The range of ideas and shifts and explorations I can employ as a writer was not as clear to me before, and now I have seen how even a small fragment of a poem can turn you to something new, better, bigger, different.

This course also exposed me to so many writers and creators whose work I hadn't interacted with prior to taking the class. Reading elegies, sonnets, golden shovels, erasure poems, narrative poems, tankas, and others not only showed me different forms of poetry but also incredibly talented, admirable writers. I am always inspired by their ability to reach out and hold the reader within their words, transforming us and using written language to make us feel, just as they did. I especially loved that the professor intentionally used works of writers from marginalized and oppressed communities, whose identities often resonated with me and were powerful parts of their pieces. Another impactful part of the class was a more specific one, when we took an "urban tanka walk" (inspired by Harryette Mullen) in Decatur and turned our observations of every-day life and things and people around us into poetry. This really enhanced my love for the connection between observing and writing, and it

implanted in me a desire to continue this habit. These physical experiences, when we were out in life, in the world, really inspired me and were some of my favorite parts of the course.

Through this class, I believe I uncovered the poet inside me slightly more than I had previously, and I was handed the tools with which I can develop her more. All the aspects of writing and thinking that I practiced this semester, and skills I was taught in this class are ones that I will continue to hold in my mind, in my work. Apart from these, one of the biggest impacts the class had on me was enhancing my mindset of a poet. I found myself finding poetry in everything – in other classes, in moments, in people, in society, in various experiences. I saw places and things and emotions all the time from which I could create. There is potential for writing everywhere, with everything, and I began to notice and think about this more than before, finding that poetry is a way of living and moving through life and the world. This reminded me of Audre Lorde's statement that poetry is a "vital necessity of our existence." While this was the quote we first interacted with at the beginning of the class, I definitely understood it and embraced it more by the time the course was completed.

ASC Reading Response - Angie Cruz's Reading

Angie Cruz talked about and read from *How Not to Drown in a Glass of Water*, her most recent novel, and *Dominicana*, her older book, in the reading I attended. She spoke inspiringly about her experiences and advice for writers, specifically to do with voice, storytelling, language and other aspects of writing. Cruz's reading involved many significant teaching moments, with advice that will continue to stay with me.

Voice is an aspect that stood out in her talk, one that she called one of the most important things to hone. It distinguishes us as creators and reflects our personal style. Cruz admirably claimed that voice is about taking risks, being courageous, and most importantly - having something to say. She emphasized how listening is important when trying to discover one's own voice. This led her to speak about how listening and storytelling are intertwined and how both are also connected to writing and reading. Cruz advised writers to "dance" between the storyteller and the listener, stating how a listener should also know how to ask the best questions. "I live by having heard others speak" - a profound quote from her talk that stood out to me.

Storytelling was a very present theme in her talk and the readings she gave from her work reflected this. Cruz spoke about how she started her own archives of photographs and stories in order to listen, hear and see other stories, as she loves and emphasizes the importance of both telling stories and reading them. An interesting experience she spoke about was how she created a "literary game" for herself involving listening to people around her in trains/buses/planes during everyday life. She interacted with and listened to the stories of Dominican, working-class women. From this, she pulled inspiration for her stories.

Cruz also spoke about language, in multiple significant aspects. She talked about leaning into her own voice, and writing "in her own weird language." She spoke more about being a speaker of both Spanish and English and how the combination of both influences her creative process. The life and rhythms of Spanish are undercurrents in her English work. This contributes to Cruz's unique voice and writing language that is her own. In the book after *Dominicana*, her first draft had the character as Spanish-speaking. She then thought it would be better for them to speak English as a second language. Playing with language like this, moving between voices the way she did, helped her get "more intimate with [her] characters and the world they live in." She noted the mix of both languages in sentences and dialogue. Cruz also spoke about the significance and challenges to do with translation. She fought to

have a Dominican translator translate her book *Dominicana* from English to Spanish (in order for it to accurately reflect the Spanish spoken by Dominicans).

Finally, Cruz's performance when reading her work reflected ideas and influences of language and voice. She read the passages in Spanish and then in English. I noticed that she read fast for parts that were overwhelming, anxious and suspenseful. Her tone matched what was happening in the story, and this was present in both languages. She employed dramatic pauses, elongated words, and adjusted her volume to enhance the experience of storytelling (therefore enhancing our experience as listeners).

Angie Cruz's talk was very eye-opening to the experiences and interesting aspects of being a writer, and more specifically, a bilingual writer. She drew attention to important things to note about storytelling, creating, and listening. Her personal experiences and reflections were insightful, and her advice is crucial and inspiring.