

Dr. Hannah Dow

Creative Writing: Poetry

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Final Portfolio

Throughout this semester, I was exposed to an array of poems from my classmates and our course materials. This variety broadened my personal reading and practice of poetry as I learned more about craft elements, such as enjambment, metaphor, and image. I spent most of my editing process strengthening my metaphors with better connections and clearer descriptions. I also learned that each of my pieces required different degrees of revision to suit my final draft preferences.

One of the first things I learned throughout this semester is that poetry can pretty much come from anywhere. I spent most of my writing career spitting out poems in spur-of-the-moment bursts from one idea. I then entered these class workshops with a poem that I wrote on a whim for a prompt with friends, “From the Writing Desk.” Next, I used “When in Doubt, Brew” as a form invention experiment from another class on poetic forms; and finally, I concluded with “Monarchs Don’t Go to the Morgue,” a piece loosely based on a biblical reference and a random fact about monarch butterflies. Each of these pieces came from a different source of inspiration, yet I ended up enjoying them all.

My first poem underwent the most changes in revision, most likely because it was composed within a few minutes among friends. Originally titled “From the Writing Desk,” I connected the act of writing to siren mythology. I quickly learned during workshop that the two ideas were not strongly connected; more specifically, I strayed from one image by heavily leaning into the other. Per my classmates’ suggestions, I toned down the writing metaphor and changed the title to provide more context on the situation. The final revision is titled “in search

of truth, they called me ‘muse’” to better illustrate the narrator as the subject of conflict. I took it a step further and rewrote the poem to follow a similar narrative from the original piece. In doing so, I kept the unrhymed tercet pattern with a falling effect in the final stanza.

One of my favorite parts of this revision was adjusting the mention of “poison” in the poem. I admittedly originally used the word “poison” to achieve a random sound effect in the piece. A classmate asked in workshop if the poison was actually medicine, which gave me ideas for the final revision—which was to include both possibilities!

I ended up shifting the topic of this poem to present the effects of addressing truth. Revision helped me look beyond my initial wishes for a siren-based poem. Instead of simply writing a poem that is full of sound effects while being confusing, I honed in on a narrative to demonstrate that truth can have beneficial or adverse effects on people based on their reactions. This was not a topic I was originally planning on addressing, and I was surprised to see it appear during revision.

“When in Doubt, Brew” was similarly adjusted for clarification, but mostly for situational context. I found that I spent so much time trying to adhere to a poetic form that my descriptions were weakened. I retitled the piece as “I Brew More *Community* as I Watch My Grandfather Leave,” allowing readers to have more description of the poem without weighing down the body of the poem itself. Per suggestion, I adjusted the first stanza to shift from a run-on sentence into more concise descriptions. I also changed “caretakers” to “who’s left” in the final line to communicate that the other people around the speaker are not medical professionals.

Once again, I faced the challenge of making an unbalanced comparison in “Monarchs Don’t Go to the Morgue.” This piece was loosely inspired by the story of the three Hebrew boys who survived the fiery furnace in the Old Testament. This was also the only poem whose title I

did not change in revision. Instead, I mainly took my classmates' suggestions to lean more into the butterfly metaphor rather than going crazy with the fire imagery. I took more time to describe the action of biting a monarch butterfly's wing and finding it to be poisonous.

I tried to exercise different elements in this poem from our guest poet, C. T. Salazar. In this piece, I practiced enjambment to try and suggest multiple meanings of some lines. I also do not clarify what kind of predator the speaker is discussing. This is an attempt to describe a subject with language that is not too narrow. I cannot name a specific predator without feeling like I am subjecting the character to a limiting description; but by describing predators in general, I leave the image up to interpretation for the reader.

Ultimately, this course pushed me to ask myself what I'm *really* wanting to say in my poetry. I still have a long way to go before I am confident in all of the poetic techniques we learned in class, but I now know that I'm capable of layering surface and deeper meanings within poems. Discussing poetic craft—especially enjambment and including the title as a run-in line—helped me generate and refine new meanings within my poetry.

From the Writing Desk
by Bethany G. Roberts

They tied me to the mast;
for when they cut, I bled
the ink of words left unsaid.

They bound my wrists
to their own voice
and cried, *Show us the way.*

I pleaded against the waves
and fought the rusted chains
that held me to the splintered fortress.

The paper sails could not direct
my ears away from the siren song
of emotions I had never fathomed.

I never could swim,
so I tried to cry out against
the chill of the water.

Yet when my voice fell victim
to the patient muse's pull,
she pried open my hands.

She pressed poison
into my palms,
but I woke up in spite.

I do not remember how,
But—
 now
 I must
 sing.

in search of truth, they called me “muse”

by Bethany G. Roberts

as they tied me to the mast
with words that were not mine,
the cutting chains hunting for what I left unsaid.

they unfolded the parchment-crisp sails,
demanded my direction for a so-called treasure
they were not capable of carrying.

they cried, *show us the way*,
prried open my lips to look for a fix
as they prayed for my medicine, my song.

I wept as my warning fell
on deaf and hungry ears, pricked
up and waiting for purpose.

they did not understand
that the truth I sipped for strength
was the same poison that pulled

my sisters away from our childhood chorus,
ever cursed to haunt these waters
with deception-laced melody.

if I obeyed, their downfall awaited in the abyss.
would they jump and sink beneath, or swim
beside me? *speak*, they repeated. *show us the way*.

unable to withstand their pursuits,
I opened my mouth, tears washing away
my silence as I begged for forgiveness.

I never wanted them to drown,
but as the old melody appears, I realize now

I
must
sing.

When in Doubt, Brew

by Bethany G. Roberts

Should I wait for another weak link in the time
That it takes to run tests and see just how much more
We can sit and talk under the sound of the door
That turns open and shut like the heartbeat I find

Pushing over and under the breath that we hold.
The next room shows the table that friends chose to fill
And I know that this won't last forever, but still—
Will you leave us alone when the coffee grows cold?

I can't sit and just wait for the time to go by,
Or decide when to help the team flutter and flit.
If I think, then I feel, and I can't handle it.
I do want you to soar, but I can't watch you fly.

So instead, I can make a fresh pot for the crew.
I can care for the caretakers when I cannot help you.

I Brew More *Community* as I Watch My Grandfather Leave
by Bethany G. Roberts

Should I wait for another weak link in the time
That it takes to run tests? I don't how much more
We can sit and talk under the sound of the door,
Which turns open and shut like the heartbeat I find

Pushing over and under the breath that we hold.
The next room shows the table that friends chose to fill
And I know that this won't last forever, but still—
Will you leave us alone when the coffee grows cold?

I can't sit and just wait for the time to go by,
Or decide when to help the team flutter and flit.
If I think, then I feel, and I can't handle it.
I do want you to soar, but I can't watch you fly.

So instead, I can make a fresh pot for the crew.
I can care for who's left when I cannot help you.

Monarchs Don't Go to the Morgue

Bethany G. Roberts

I was sick of being
endangered at your hand,
so I silently slipped
into my chrysalis;
disappearing, developing
my own wings,
far away from your
brutal assistance.

I may be delicate, but I am far
from fragile. I am burning.
I am bright. I am fire coursing
past the pit you carved, glowing
beyond thin boundaries, catching
your gaze and enchanting you
to meet your demise.

But as you decide to face beauty
with fang, you will soon find
I am venom. I am vivid.
I am vengeance.
Not because I wanted to fight,
but because I decided to survive.

I am protected by the process
that would have melted you
in its wake. Now, I carry the spark
on which I thrive, but you may not
survive this test by fire.

Do not mistake me for
what you wanted to be.
I am not judge, but human torch—
not by choice, but as byproduct
of the furnace you left me in,
the flame that makes me
catalyst for countering your corruption.

And as I watch you fall
After the bite, my dear,
I can only fly into my next
metamorphosis.

Monarchs Don't Go to the Morgue

Bethany G. Roberts

so when I was sick of being
endangered at your hand,
I silently slipped
into my chrysalis;
disappearing, developing
my own wings,
far away from your
brutal assistance.

I may be delicate, but I am far
from fragile. I am burning.
I am bright. I am the fire coursing
beyond the pit you prepared,
filling my wings and lifting
me above your means.

My light may catch your gaze,
enchancing you
to meet your demise.
When you decide to look
for my vein, you will soon find
you are greeting fire
with fang.

You will learn
I am venom. I am vivid.
I am vengeance.
Not because I intended to fight,
but because I decided to survive.
I am protected by the process
that would have melted you
in its wake.

Do not mistake me for
what you wanted to be,
for I am not judge, but human torch—
a byproduct of the furnace you left me in,
daughter of the flame that makes me
catalyst for countering your corruption.

And as I watch you fall after the bite,
my dear, I can only fly into my next
metamorphosis.