

## Reflection Essay

I have to admit that as I put together this collection of work, I was embarrassed by my earlier efforts at essays and creative writing. It was difficult to resist the urge to totally rewrite my very first college English class essay and to edit the others. I eventually decided that editing this work would take away from the visual representation of my journey as a writer, a learner and a person. It is amazing to me to look back at my essay for Dr. Taylor's British Literature class and compare it with the work I am doing now for my last literature class at Berry. I have grown in so many ways. I've been able to write from my brain with a critical perspective instead of always writing from my heart, and I've been able to write poetry that is universal in some ways instead of being so focused on my own life and experience. This growth came from professors dedicated to helping students really think and really learn, from challenging classes, from hours spent writing in creative writing journals, from spending long nights in *The Carrier* office, and from personal relationships with professors.

I entered college already feeling pretty confident about myself as a writer. I was one of the more talented students at my high school and I was used to receiving excellent grades. My first English class was Dr. Taylor's British Literature class and although I did well in the class, I struggled for the first time. He expected me to produce critical work in a way I had not written or even thought before. This is why I included the first essay in the portfolio. It is the first essay I wrote for my English major, and it was the first among many essays I really struggled to write. It reflects a lot of immaturity as a person and a writer, and although I hate to look at it and leave it somewhere where other people could read it, I know it is helpful to remember where I started. I took a lot of great classes and

some classes that I hated, but I certainly learned something valuable from each one. I became very interested in feminism and gender issues and found myself reading literature most often from a feminist point of view. This is why I included the Victorian Literature essay. It is representative of my interest in the ideas of femininity and how they have changed over time and how that informs my own ideas of what it means to be a woman. For Dr. Trolander's Jane Austen class I wrote the longest paper I have ever written. I branched out from my usual essay topics of femininity or language or poetry and chose a something I knew nothing about. It was really difficult, but I am really proud of the result. I think it represents the essay in my college career that was most challenging, the most interesting and that I was most unsure of. Throughout the process of writing it I had no idea if anything I was writing was relevant or interesting or if it was good scholarship. I was both surprised and unsurprised when I got my grade back because I was unsure of myself but I also knew how much work I had put into the essay and I hoped that would be reflected in my writing.

I was relieved to be able to include so much of my creative writing in my portfolio, because I think that is my real strength as a writer. It is far easier for me to feel and evoke feelings in others with my words than it is for me to compose an essay that challenges other people's ideas of a work of literature. The poetry is roughly in chronological order to represent my development as a poet. I think the poetry is united in some ways, like my particular rhythm and word choices, but it also reflects my continuing attempt to settle into my own voice. The pieces I have included here have been published in *Ramifications*, *Lunch Ticket* and have won awards like the Southern Women Writers Student Award and several of the English Department Creative Writing

Awards. These poems remind me of my growing confidence as a poet and public speaker. I was terrified to read “Anarchy for Him Body Spray” in front of the tiny audience that came to the award presentation for the Southern Women Writers Conference. I practiced for days and was shaking through the whole ordeal. I am still nervous about reading my work in front of people, but I am much more comfortable now. I have participated and organized several readings and have started spending more time sending my work out for publication. I am much more comfortable sharing my ideas and my passion for language because of my creative writing classes and professors. Through my creative non-fiction class I learned that my story is valuable – the things that have happened in my life may relate to other people’s lives, and my story is worth telling even if no one else resonates with it. I have really fallen in love with this genre of writing, and I’ve learned a lot about my own life as well as my craft.

The last three poems and the essay on Spanish Renaissance Poetry in the appendix represent an important development in my life over the last four years. I have taken Spanish classes since I was in elementary school and have spent enough time abroad to feel a profound connection with another culture and the Spanish language; however, I did not think it would be useful to continue taking Spanish classes in college. I am still unsure how it happened, but I found myself declaring a Spanish major in my second semester of freshman year. It took a while for me to unite Spanish with my poetry, but in an experiment one day I wrote a poem in Spanish and English. I loved it. Ever since then I’ve been experimenting more and more with the way the two languages play together, writing poems in English first, then Spanish, then a combination of the two until I find the language in which the poem feels most at home. I have also spent

considerable time reading and studying Spanish-language poetry and literature. This has become my niche, and I have really enjoyed it. It's different than what a lot of poets are doing, and it really reflects my interests and who I am.

I thought this blend of Spanish and English poetry would be just a hobby until the fall semester of my senior year when I took the new Writing and Community class with Dr. Meek. I learned how significant writing could be in people's lives, and I learned how important it was to me to make it a part of my life after graduation. I never thought I would be able to "do something" with my writing – I just thought it would be something I did in my free time after I got home from my "real job." That still may be the case, but this Writing and Community class opened my eyes to a whole new world of writing-related work. In this class we studied how writing could be used in therapy and different kinds of social work. We organized a community poetry reading and a writing workshop for area teens, which were incredible experiences. We were also asked to create our own creative writing workshops on paper that we could enact in our communities after graduation. This assignment was significant for me because I discovered that I could still combine my love for writing and my interest in the Latino community in Georgia and Tennessee. I planned an afterschool writing program for Latino children, and for the first time I could really see myself doing something similar after graduation. I think this was perhaps the most significant class I have taken at Berry College because it taught me that the things that I have learned over the past four years are actually valuable and useful in the world I am about to enter.

My career at Berry has taught me more than I could possibly summarize about life and education and freedom and thought and I have certainly become a stronger writer and

reader through the classes and faculty of the English department. Overall, the most significant thing I have learned is my passion for my community. Part of the reason I chose to study English is because I love stories. I want to know the stories of the people around me and I want to write about them because I want to share in their stories, their burdens and their lives. The English department at Berry has taught me the mechanics of doing that – how to read books in order to pick out the significance in the stories, how to write critically, and how to write good poetry. It has also taught me that writing is a legitimate and valuable path towards loving people well and sharing in their lives. This, I think, is what college should be about. My studies have pointed me toward and given me the skills needed for many different professional paths, but ultimately it has taught me to be a more thoughtful and compassionate human being.