

Shawn Spagna

“a spring soon to be lost”

Weekly Poem Drafts (excluding workshop poems)

Week Two:

I remember the smell of my grandpa's camera store.

I remember the sound of the alarm as we walked in, loud and obtrusive for early summer mornings.

I remember how it felt to be driven to my dad's childhood home through a sea of trees and winding roads.

I remember how excited I was for McDonald's pancakes once we arrived.

I remember staring at stained glass windows at church as a young boy.

I remember my confusion during the "Our Father" on my first day of catholic school.

I remember my mother's Italian cooking, rushed after work but before my sports events.

I remember sitting at the dining room table and taking "no thank you helpings" of squash.

I remember how excited I was to watch movies with my dad.

I remember camping in the backyard with a portable DVD player and a stack of Pringles.

I remember taking walks down the main road as a young man.

I remember singing loudly with my CD player in hand.

I remember my excitement on Christmas mornings.

I remember spending hours in my Grandpa's living room with torn wrapping paper.

I remember watering the plants for my mother over the summer.

I remember clumsily cramming the times tables into my head before the coming fall.

I remember the excitement of a fresh start in high school.

I remember the feeling of wanting to move on.

I remember writing letters to friends and to family that I never sent.

I remember my humiliation when they were exhumed from the garbage.

Week Three (short poems:)

Steam pours

Over the

Purple walls

Of the Bathroom

I'm naked

And damp

As I turn

The shining faucet

And turn matte

My shining body

The room

Is dark

At this

Early hour

Fake

Red lights

Leak from

The bottom

Of the

Warm bed,

A modern

Comfort.

Perhaps

I am home.

Snow

Follows

The hill

To its

End

And here

Am I,

At the top,

Near

The sun,

Watching

It all melt.

Today

I work

In the

Very back

Of this

Place,

Light

From a bulb,

Tape

On my finger

Tips,

Sticky and

Black

As I close

Brown

Boxes

And

Place them

On a

Falling

Metal

Rack.

The gray door

Gives way

To the sunlight,

And at once

I am free,

The sun shines

Brightly

On a car that

Should be

Cold and frosted,

The air

Smells of

Car

Pollution,

My dry lips

Taste of

Bitter

Red Iron.

Week Five:

At the end
Of the week,
My
Bare
Fragile scalp
Meets moving
Blade,

With
This Simple
Stroke of Metal,
My
Cellular Darkness
Is Scattered
And Suddenly
I
Feel
Assertive
Acceptance
And
A
New, Restored
Self-Image
Flood
My
Balding Head,
A Reminder
That
Dark
Old, Patterns
Can be Shaven.

Week Six:

A Childish Contempt

A Childish Contempt

Flows Through My Brain,

An Embarrassed Rage.

No Way To Contain The
Flying Embers,
Thrown Across the Room,
My Brain's Secreting Gasoline
And I Feed the Flame,
After Years of Being Burned,
No Hood to Hide
The Raging Sea of Flames
In Coal Eyes,
Then A Mix of Damp Ash
And Dark Water,
I'm Proving Them Right,
No Better Than This Shame
Suffocating
My Young, Blackened Lungs

Week Ten:

Sending a Nation to Heaven

Today,
I will turn my back to Satan
And dispel malicious spirits,
With the simple stroke of a pen,

I will abolish Sins of Sodom
And allow His seed to grow,

All with this secular instrument,
I will punish blasphemers
And bring honor to Poland,
As the people trust that I will,

I am God's mortal instrument,
A humble follower of Christ
Who will extend Divine Love to All,

I am ruled by Christian Law,
A law greater than man
That will send a Nation to Heaven.

Week Eleven:

The Basement of My Childhood Home

We used to parachute down these steps
With plastic shopping bags over our heads,
The streaming yellow ruffles and
Laughing young mouths

Fell to the wood floor over there,
It was always worth the bruises.
We were still missing teeth then,
Back when we used green couch cushions
To sled down these hardwood steps
And here they are,
As strong and inviting as they were
Only 15 short years ago,
Then, the walls coated with peeling white wallpaper,
I loved the green couches,
So vibrant and tree-like in their firmness,
Today, the room is skin-toned
With soft tan walls and white accents,
It's inviting and safe,
With the new matching furniture,
I feel like my father in here,
Lounging in his chair after a long day at work
With a Blu-Ray spinning in the player,
The flashing television illuminates the room,
Just as they used to in my youth
After a long school week,
For now, I am still here,
For now, I am home.

Week Thirteen:

A Holy Man (A Letter From the Divine Gatekeeper)

No man or beast has ever supposed that
They are above the laws of nature and
Lived to tell the tale of what comes after,
To do so would be to cheat death and stand
Above the role that God has made for them,
To spit on those ahead and behind and
Defiantly claw their way out of hell,
These damned souls always start where they began,
As I pull them back to their mortal state
With the swift and graceful swing of my hand,
There is a pleasure that comes with order
And the fulfillment of God's sacred plan,
If you think me evil or ungodly,
You should know I'm really a Holy Man.

Week Fourteen:

Muse

You are my Muse
A splash of Color
To the Mundane,

A hope found and Lost,

A Potential

Never Realized,

A canceled Plan

That won't Return

My lousy Calls

Though I know You

Will not Return

You are my Muse.

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Revised Poems (Including Workshop Poems)

Workshop One (Revised):

Divine, Even in Life

Look closely and you can see the
Pigment fade from your dying skin
As the Earth claims you back again,
With a cold and soft embrace.

It's just as sad and beautiful as
Everything you've ever said,
Though spoken between a warm
Motherly smile,
Time has dampened
Your bright kind words
Their new weight makes them
Impossible to forget.

Now, as I sit in this lot of parked
Cars, alone with the lines
On the pavement,
It's all coming back to me
In short, silent bursts of black
Between hot flashes of

Salted saline tears:

Your vibrant red hair,

The sound of infectious laughter,

The way you moved,

The way you spoke,

Divine.

Even in life.

Workshop Two (Revised):

Dear Tender Youth...

Dear Tender Youth,

I haven't forgotten you,

And all of the heartbreak

We experienced together,

Moving from Muse to Muse

With fallible heart in hand,

I know the care that went into

Crafting your poster-bound walls,

Furnished with the sweaty faces of your idols,

It seemed like every week you'd

Poke another hole in the paster

To suit a new interest of yours,

Though I owe my active imagination to you,

(To which I am forever grateful,)

I must inform you that

You fell for your own ideas

Rather than the human shells that inspired them

Especially when you met those girls in school.

Despite your short-comings

And resounding immaturity

You gave all the love one could give

To Friends

To Family

To Teachers

And were smacked with the

Firm hand of neglect

Over and over again,

I know how it stung and

I have not forgotten,

They had no reason to leave you there

In the schoolyard,

To fend for yourself as you dreamt of

A future that never came true,

With chalk in your hand

And a tear in your eye.

Despite dead-end after dead-end,
To your human senses,
Every face a fascination,
A vigorous present
And prospect future,
Every room a reluctant home,
Now vacated and damaged
With time's irreverent passing,

Oh, Tender Friend,
Can we outlive our past?
The same past
Our bodies survived,
Though scarred with deep
Reminders of age,
The deep lines in our face,
The shifting hairline,
The eyes of hurt that shout above our voices.

To even the brightest of spirits,
I suppose that Age is
The duration of sorrow,

And now,
The past is so often blurred
With fleeting presents,
Time is unstuck
By my persistent thought
And the constant fluttering
Of the fearful, beating heart
You have left me,
So human in its tenderness
That it is impossible for me to hate.

Workshop Three (Revised):

A Lover's Leg

There is a casted leg
Under rows of bandage
Prostrate on our bed
Lined with fresh cuts
And a tail of thread.
It stares at me quietly
With a radiating hue of red
As I look up at her face and
Place an ice pack to her head.
Though our first sun has passed

And the best is still ahead,
We have a cure
To this ceaseless dread.

We choose to live although
We could die instead,
And that is all
That needs to be said.

Muse (revised)

You are my Muse,
A face that my heart
Reluctantly returns to
When you're away,
A piece I'd rather do
Without but can't
Seem to throw away.
You're a hope found and lost
That won't return
My lousy calls,
But when you do,
You're a disruption

That I secretly welcome,
A distraction that
I can't help but entertain
Whenever our paths cross.
Though I try to deny it,
You're a companion that I know
I won't find elsewhere
And when we're together,
You remind me why
You are my Muse

Bald (Erasing the Dark Death) (a revision)

When fragile scalp
Meets moving blade,
Flaking skin is revealed behind
Patchy, scattered dark remains.
It's a visceral reminder
Of humanity
Just beyond the expression of
The Dark Death:
A death not yet faded with time,
A pigmented decay.
This weekly ritual allows the user

To allude death,
If only for a week,
With their willful erasure of aging.
Their hope is to transcend
The soft abundance of youthful life
And stand at the threshold of what is to come.

Shower (a simple photograph)

Steam pours over the
Purple walls of the Bathroom
And slowly drips from the ceiling
As the mirror quickly catches the clouds,
The towel lies lazily on the beige counter
As the folded edges sag slightly over the edge,
The cold tile floor is covered in a
Fuzzy accent rug, damp with the
Footprints of wet toes.

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Final Portfolio Essay

As I continue to revise my work, I find it increasingly difficult to pick a favorite. If I must choose, I think that my first two workshop poems (“Divine, Even in Life” and “Dear Tender Youth...”) are among my best works this semester. Though both poems are based on my personal experiences, I feel that both poems succeed in speaking to an overarching human experience. “Divine, Even in Life” was my attempt to tackle grief and the new weight that old memories hold after a loved one has passed away. I think that that is a relatively universal experience among those who have lost someone dear to them and I’m glad that I was able to express my continued experience of grief in a way that could (hopefully) be cathartic and relatable to others. This is particularly true of the last stanza in which I reflect on how seemingly mundane experiences can remind you of a deceased person’s life and passing, such as sitting in an old parking lot. In my experience, I find that some of my most visceral memories and emotions come up in the silence of solitude in situations like that one and I do not think I’m alone in that. “Dear Tender Youth...” slowly evolved into a letter to my past self and I think that many of the sentiments there are things that others would probably feel the need to address with a younger version of themselves. For example, I had no idea how much of my perception of the world was predicated on my imagination, especially my perception of people I didn’t know (who I pretended I did know.) This comes up in the first stanza of the poem in which I extend that to both celebrities and the girls I had crushes on as a kid. I find that there is both a beauty and a sadness to this soon-to-be-jaded imaginative spirit and I think that others may agree.

My week five poem which would later become “Bald (Erasing the Dark Death)” was the hardest poem for me to write. While writing the draft, I became preoccupied with the idea of structure as a method of communication in a poem. While thinking about this, I first attempted to

create a poem with an intricate syllabic pattern that would break at a specific point and create a sense of unity, much like a shaved head. After a few hours, I quickly gave up on this idea and decided to simply write my thoughts down with broken lines which also proved to be more difficult than I originally thought. In poems like this, it's hard to identify the line between clever and silly, especially when so much work was put into it. This particularly the case for the final line of the first draft in which I said "A reminder that dark, old patterns can be shaven." This is a reference to harmful thought patterns as well as male pattern baldness, which in some ways could be clever but here, it is clumsy. While revising the poem, I decided to basically start over and speak from an objective point of view. However this objective perspective didn't help me in escaping silliness as I am still not completely sure that the "Dark Death" sentiment is a good one. In short, I've learned there is such a thing as overthinking a poem.

Throughout the course of this semester, I've learned to consider my audience in a way that I hadn't before. Most of the poetry I wrote before enrolling in this course was a form of self-expression where little to no one ever read what I was writing. As a result, I would often underdevelop the imagery/symbols in my work which was a great disservice to my later work. Since hearing the feedback from classmates and reading the feedback for other poet's work, I have come to realize the importance of an audience. This focus on an audience has pushed me to create better, more focused work as I am more focused on detail and the quality of the end product. Whether it is realistic that others will read the work or not, I think it's important for a poet to consider this kind of pushback whenever they are writing something that is important to them.

In addition to considering the audience, I've grown as a poet in the sense that I embrace my voice and the topics that come naturally to me. While I used to be a little self-conscious

about my nostalgic, time-sensitive side, I find that it has been one of my greatest assets as a poet which has helped my overall self-esteem. I've learned to listen to myself and not to ignore thoughts and inspirations that continue to reoccur. If something continues to come up, I think it's important to address it, preferably from a new philosophical angle, which often becomes evident in the process of writing and revision. The fact that writing can inspire thoughts rather than just express them is a rather new idea to me and I'm glad that I've come across it in this course.

In my poetry, I am often speaking to myself in public. By addressing the poem to myself and a non-specified audience (strangers), I consider the perception of the general public while remaining honest and pure in my observations and symbols. I find that there is a strange anonymousness that comes with expressing yourself in public that is very similar to private, personal expression. I use this similarity to my advantage in my writing as I hope to tap into a greater, shared human experience through the expression of my personal experience. This shared experience often involves universal concepts such as time, memory, life and death in a way that will hopefully inspire thought about life's greatest mysteries and where the human race fits in.