

Poetry and Enlightenment

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Introduction

Haolin wrote this paper for WRS 101 class. Students were asked to write a story about a writing event that they experienced at some point in their lives. They were also asked to reflect on the social significance of that writing in terms of what it meant to them, what they had learnt from it and whether or not the event helped shape their writing in any way. Haolin chose an appealing story the time he was asked to write a poem and how relating to Edgar Allan Poe as well as having an encouraging teacher helped him overcome his lack of writing confidence.

Keywords: emotion, loneliness, poetry, writing skills



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² *Writing across the University of Alberta* (WAUA) publishes undergraduate student writing from writing studies courses and courses focused on writing studies practices and scholarship at the University of Alberta. You can find WAUA online at <https://writingacrossuofa.ca/>.

I still remember my days in English class at my high school three years ago. Ms. Monroe always looked at me smiling when I entered the classroom at 9 o'clock daily. It was my first time in Canada, and I was very unfamiliar with the learning environment here, and I was still afraid of the teachers. Ms. Monroe guided me through each English class and kept me interested in the content. She taught me how to write brilliant narratives; one of my most memorable moments was a poem.

That day, Ms. Monroe gave us an assignment; each one of us wrote a poem with rhyme and poetic conception. This type of writing was a great challenge for me. I had never experienced writing a poem by myself in school; all the time, we were always reading poems from famous poets to memorize them. So, choosing a theme was a fundamental question. As I thought about how to work around my theme, Ms. Monroe seemed to see my confusion. She asked me, "You seem a little puzzled. Do you need help?"

"I don't know what way I should go about writing my poem."

"Have you ever tried to explain poetic conception?"

"I've thought about writing out some verses about my life, but my life doesn't seem to have any story for me to write about..."

"You should probably go ahead and think about your situation; you think your life is boring, so why don't you describe yourself as a lonely warrior?"

I was very inspired by Ms. Monroe's words; maybe my life will be boring, but why can't I vividly describe this boring life? So, I started an initial creation.

I spent the next few days feeling what state my life was in. I kept a daily log of what I did throughout the day. I watched and wrote diary entries for three days and realized that my life hadn't changed much; I always went to school, played sports, and played video games. It was in this little recording that I felt alone, so I wrote out eight stanzas about my feelings and gave them to Ms. Monroe for her advice. After she read my draft, she gently said, "Your rhymes are good, but I have a hard time feeling your loneliness. Your stanzas are rhyming for the sake of rhyming, and that's not right. Can you try to decrease your poetry skill and add more personal emotion?" She didn't reject my poem, thus going on to affirm something. I understood Ms. Monroe was helping me write a beautiful poem.

From that day on, I began to study verses, and I felt the meaning of famous poets from what they expressed in their verses. When I came across Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," I immediately experienced that sense of loneliness. The scene in his verse describes a lonely man, lost and sitting in his chamber, remembering his deceased. I immediately felt

his loneliness when I saw the contrast between the luxurious chamber and the one man. I was so inspired that I immediately began to write that raven of my own.

I felt the loneliness that belonged to Edgar Allan Poe in his verses. Then, I imitated his rhymes and style and wrote a poem about loneliness. I gave my verses to Ms. Monroe again. When Ms. Monroe finished reading it, she said to me, “Your verses are a little bit better than last time, and not only that, but you described your feelings of loneliness better than last time. However, you are trying to imitate Edgar Allan Poe's style and rhyme. Such imitation will make you easily lose that sense of loneliness that belongs to you. You may use its poetic techniques, but do not imitate them too much.” With Ms. Monroe's comments, I knew I could write an excellent poem.

The day before Submission Day arrived, I wrote my poem again and added some of Edgar Allan Poe's rhymes, but I only used some of his poetic techniques this time. Then, I combined them with my experiences and day-to-day state to describe a feeling of loneliness completely different from Edgar Allan Poe's. This was one of the most perfect and expressive poems I had written in this period. I had a lot of confidence in this poem.

It was finally time to submit, and I was very nervous that day. When we were done submitting, Ms. Monroe suddenly asked us to read our verses. So, everyone needed to go to the front and read their written verses. At that moment, probably because I had never presented my poem, my body trembled uncontrollably. Ms. Monroe saw my fear, smiled, and said, “Don't be afraid; you're just showing them who you are. They won't laugh at you; trust yourself and your poem, and you'll be able to make the other students feel it.” So, after listening to the poems written by the other students, it was finally my turn. As I stood at the front, my breathing became rapid, my hands couldn't stop shaking, and my mind went blank momentarily. I looked over to Ms. Monroe, sitting in her seat, looking at me with a smile the whole time; it was a very warm smile, as if a kind mother was looking at her child. At that moment, I was encouraged and began reading my poem. It was a poem about loneliness, and I wrote about the distance between me, my friends, and the world. When I finished the poem, the class applauded me, and Ms. Monroe started to celebrate after giving me a complimentary look. At that moment, I felt warmth for the first time in Canada.

From that day on, Ms. Monroe would always tell me to pay attention to tabulating my ideas, and that was one of the first very important phrases for me in English writing. I learned how to express my ideas through words. Not only that, but this behaviour helped me a lot in analyzing my academic papers and essays in the future. She inspired me to write about hope and passion instead of loneliness.

I am still very grateful to Ms. Monroe. She is the one who taught me how to write, and she is the one who made me feel the power of literature. I learned a lot about writing from

her class, and at the same time, she taught me one of the most important things: how to express my emotions and thoughts through words.