Makayla Drake

The Evolution of My Relationship with Poetry

Poetry often feels like an enigma – a form of expression that seems both profound and elusive, something that requires an expert's eye to decode. When I first encountered poetry, I was introduced to the formal, and often serious language of Shakespeare. His sonnets were filled with complex metaphors and intricate structures that made them feel distant and hard to approach. I believed that poetry was something that required deep analysis to understand, and at times, it felt like a chore. The elevated language and lofty themes left me feeling removed from the essence of the poems. It seemed as though there was a barrier between me and the art form that I could never quite break through. However, everything changed when I read The "Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. The sound and rhythm of the poem were beautiful, and it was far easier to follow than Shakespeare's works. I was captivated by the simplicity and musicality of Poe's writing, and it made me realize that poetry could be more than just dense, serious language containing hidden meanings. My relationship with poetry has truly evolved: from struggling with Shakespeare to appreciating the humor and playfulness of poets like Harryette Mullen, whose "Dim Lady" brings a humorous twist to the traditional love poem.

My initial experiences with poetry were shaped by reading Shakespeare's sonnets in high school, which I found to be intellectually demanding and emotionally intense. The formal structure and elevated language made it hard for me to connect with the poems. I often felt like I was missing something essential, and I struggled to understand the deeper meanings behind the

metaphors. “Sonnet 130”, for example, with its negative comparisons “My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun” (Shakespeare, line 1), seemed almost dull to me at first. I had trouble grasping the subtleties of his intention and the clever way he was subverting the conventional ideas of beauty. Shakespeare's poetic approach felt like a puzzle that I had to solve, and while I respected the complexity of his work, that did not mean I always enjoyed reading it. The challenge of his writing, rather than enticing me, often left me feeling disconnected. Then, everything changed when I read “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe. For the first time, I encountered a poem that was beautiful in its sound and relatively easy to follow. I was drawn to the rhythm and repetition in the poem, which created a haunting atmosphere that kept me engaged. The mysterious and melancholic tone of “The Raven” was still serious, but the clarity of the language made it feel more accessible. The way the poem built suspense with its repeated refrain – “Nevermore” (Poe, line 60) – was captivating. It was a refreshing change of pace from the dense language of Shakespeare, and I found myself enjoying the experience of reading poetry for the first time in a long while.

In contrast to Shakespeare’s almost "dullness" in “Sonnet 130”, I found Harryette Mullen’s “Dim Lady” to be a refreshing and humorous take on the traditional love poem. Mullen parodies Shakespeare’s sonnet by presenting a description of a woman who is far from the idealized figure of beauty often celebrated in love poetry. She writes, “My honeybunch’s peepers are nothing like neon. Today’s special at Red Lobster is redder than her kisser” (Mullen, lines 1-2). Mullen’s approach is playful and irreverent, poking fun at the exaggerated language typically used to describe beauty. By comparing her lover’s features to mundane things like “institutional beige” and “slinkys,” Mullen brings humor and lightness to the poem, creating a

contrast to the heavy seriousness of traditional sonnets. What I particularly appreciate about "Dim Lady" is the way it takes familiar tropes of love poetry and twists them to create humor and critical distance. While Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130" subverts the idealization of beauty by focusing on the imperfections of the lover, Mullen's poem adds another layer by parodying the very conventions of love poetry. Mullen's humor makes the poem feel more grounded in reality, yet the speaker's affection for her "plain" lover shines through in the same way it does in Shakespeare's sonnet. In this way, Mullen's playful tone actually brings the reader closer to the speaker's emotions, allowing for a more intimate and relatable expression of love. It is clear that poetry does not have to adhere to old conventions to express something deeply personal. By breaking the mold, Mullen brings a refreshing perspective on the way we view relationships and beauty.

To conclude, my relationship with poetry has evolved from discomfort and confusion to appreciation and enjoyment. While my first encounters with poetry, such as reading Shakespeare's Sonnet 130", left me feeling disconnected from the art form, I later discovered the beauty and accessibility of poems like "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. "The Raven" introduced me to the idea that poetry could be both beautiful in sound and relatively easy to follow. The accessibility of "The Raven" helped me see that not all poetry required extensive analysis to appreciate. Through its melodic quality and the intensity of its rhythm, it invited me into its world, rather than making me feel excluded. Further exploration of poets like Harryette Mullen, with her humorous "Dim Lady", helped me appreciate that poetry does not have to be stiff or serious to express love and emotion. I learned that poetry could be both serious and humorous, formal and playful, depending on the poet's approach. I discovered that these varying

styles of poetry are not just valid in their own right but also have the ability to create emotional and intellectual connections with the reader. Through these diverse experiences, I have come to realize that poetry is not limited to one particular style or tone – it can be both serious and humorous, formal and playful, depending on the poet's approach. Poetry, I now see, has the power to surprise, entertain, and connect in ways that transcend rigid boundaries.

Works Cited

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